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Chef from Africa wows students in Commons

by Linda Goldstein

On Wednesday April 2nd during lunch (11:30-1:30), the Commons vegetarian station played host to Chef Johann Becker, the Culinary Training Officer for Sodexo South Africa. Chef Becker came to IIT through Sodexo's Global Chef Program which, according to Sodexo's website, started in 2003. "This innovative program facilitates the exchange of our executive chefs between affiliates around the world. Each Global Chef shares authentic international cuisine and traditional cooking techniques with clients, customers, staff, and on-site culinary team." Maybe some of the recipes and ideas that Chef Becker brought with him will linger on in our Commons experience. IIT also reaped the benefits of the Global Chef program last semester with a guest chef who drew lines that blocked walkways.

The RHA Food Committee was involved in bringing Chef Becker to IIT – it's amazing what can come up in meetings. In general, possibly because of the cost of the undertaking, we only get one such event per semester. However, there are still hopes of bringing back Indian Tuesday, which is a much cheaper way to eat something different and pleasant.

Who is Chef Johann Becker? He worked in the catering corps in the South African National Defense Force, and was a '91 graduate from the Vall University of Food Service with a diploma in Foodservice Management. Since then, Johann has achieved many awards in the culinary world – his detailed biography is amazement after amazement. He joined Sodexo in 2005. "For Johann, food is as much an art as it is a passion." Food is more than fuel, and it's great that Sodexo has brought us confirmation of this.

What, precisely, was the meal? The menu: – Tea Smoked Springbok Loin with a fresh Mango Salad – Flame Grilled Ostrich Fillet with a Red Wine, Carmelized Onion and

Balsamic Reduction – Denningvleis – Pumpkin Fritters with Cinnamon Sugar – Crumbly Pap (Puto Pap)

There was something called a "Milk Tart" which reminded me of custard in a pastry cup, sprinkled with cinnamon.

Springbok is a type of antelope. Mangos are fruits; you may have seen them? The salad was tangy and delightful to the palate- a pleasing touch of color. Also – yes, you actually ate ostrich meat. I was as surprised as you were. I wondered about the implications of this – what is the cost of ostrich meat? Is there some percentage of the population that's allergic to ostrich? Why did I not taste a difference? (I'm not up on my meats; I thought it was some rare cut of pork or beef.) Denningvleis is (I'm fairly certain) a preparation of lamb. As you may have guessed, it's a recipe from Africa, and not familiar in either name or taste to those of us who are not often exposed to haute cuisine. And if you can track down the identity of Crumbly/Puto Pap, I would be interested. It was delicious.

Sodexo brought us something strange and wonderful. Sodexo brings us food to keep body and soul together daily, and thanks in part to the RHA Food Committee, the student body's feedback has been heard and acted upon. Improvement in every area in which improvement is requested – what more can you ask for? For more information on future plans and sustainability initiatives or to send feedback, email food@iit.edu. For more ostrich, catch your own.