



## A Latin luncheon

### Sodexo's celebrity chef visits from Colombia

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Before 10 a.m. on Tuesday, Sodexo's chef Patrick Nearing was about to lose it. He couldn't find the green plantains that visiting chef Joaquin Suarez needed to complete a recipe to be served at 11:30 a.m.

Then, just in time, the plantains were found at a local discount grocer.

Visiting the Portland State campus for one week, Suarez will cook for students and faculty as part of the Sodexo Global Chef Program, which exchanges recipes and kitchen techniques across the globe.

Tuesday's luncheon hosted about 100 guests, treating them to a typical dish from Suarez's South American home.

"I'm here to share with you all the flavors of Colombia," Suarez told the audience, "so you'll have a different idea of what it's all about."

Nearing began preparing for the event last week by phone conference with Suarez. He reviewed special equipment and ingredients needed to recreate the typical Colombian kitchen, using techniques and flavors not common in the States.

Sodexo's usual produce purveyor was hunting for green plantains, yucca and passion fruit juice, all staple ingredients of Colombian cuisine.

"We had a difficult time, trying to locate those plantains especially, up until about 10

a.m." Nearing said. "Finally we had someone get them at Food4Less this morning."

"Overall, the event came together pretty well-it's always interesting to see," Nearing said. "The curtain goes up and you better be ready."

A long buffet table stretched across the east wall of the Multicultural Center, and diners lined up promptly to sample the chef's creations. Thick slices of pork loin, a dry shredded beef and short links of spicy chorizo started off the lunch. Guests moved on to plain white rice, fat red beans, a warm tomato salsa, fried green plantains and finally a perfectly fried egg.

Chef Suarez stood at the end of the long line of ingredients, greeting each person and encouraging everyone who passed by to mix all the components together on the plate for the best flavor.

While waiting in line, the guests expressed their enthusiasm as the sweet smell of pineapple and spices tickled their noses.

Sa'eed Haji, the assistant director of the Multicultural Center, waited patiently for lunch. "Having new and different kinds of food is always good," Haji said. "Here at Portland State, having diverse foods to go along with our diverse population is always good."

Haji was especially pleased to see that these recipes would be incorporated into the everyday menu for Sodexo.

"If you want to have ethnic food, a lot of the time you have to go outside the university," Haji said. "He's leaving the recipe and I'm excited that we can have this as an option."

Guests listened to Suarez as they ate, picking the last few grains of rice from their plates.

"The dish that you're eating is a typical dish of the people who work the land in the Antioquia region," Suarez said, referring to the mountainous terrain surrounding the city Medellin. "The farmers use what they have around them in their daily dishes."

Colombia, Suarez said, is not as industrialized as the United States, and therefore has historically used its own organic and local products out of necessity, drawing parallels to the Portland food scene.

"We have some great beer at home, although it's blonde and not as robust as the beers here," Suarez told the diners. "You here in Portland have some of the best."

"I feel like I've been here before, but it's only been two days," he added.

As the first executive chef of Sodexo's Global Chef Program to visit PSU, Suarez said he enjoys working with the local teams he encounters and learning new things from them.

Beth Bayrd, sales and marketing director for Sodexho's PSU Dining, said, "One idea behind this program is to enable our chefs to do these recipes in their kitchens in the future, once they've been taught one-on-one by the chef."

"We heard back in December that we would be hosting a global chef," Bayrd said.

This is the second year that Sodexho has operated as Portland State's food service provider, and Bayrd said she was happy to be able to organize Suarez's visit.

"Now that we've gotten the first year out of the way, the second year is a perfect time to have a global chef come visit," Bayrd said.

Suarez prepared a VIP lunch at the Simon Benson House for school administrators on Wednesday. Menu highlights included ceviche de pescado, a cold, citrus-marinated fish salad, and cóctel de langostino, a regional take on shrimp cocktail. Pollo en marinación de maracuya was the main dish, chicken breast marinated in passion fruit juice.

Diners at Ondine Wednesday night were treated to a special dinner menu as well, with several options coming from Suarez's recipe collection.

On Friday evening, chef Suarez will visit LV's Uptown, a full-service restaurant located in University Place, preparing several upscale items for the menu. Greta Metassa will be performing that evening as part of the Portland Jazz Festival.

"That will be a good combination," Suarez said on Tuesday afternoon. "Colombian food and jazz."

### **Agua de panela**

In the Colombian countryside, Suárez said, people don't drink soda. Instead, they mix the raw cane sugar called panela from local plantations with lime juice and water to make this refreshing drink. Try it hot, he suggested, when you need some relief from a cold. "It's a typical mother's remedy," Suarez said. "It will help clear out the lungs and let you sleep better."

Add a shot or two of rum, and it will really taste good going down.

Put 2 cups water on the stove. Add 2 ounces (or to taste-should be a light caramel color) light brown cane sugar, and stir until dissolved. Remove from heat and pour into a mug if serving hot, or over ice if serving cold. Squeeze the juice of 1 lime into each serving and stir.

Note: Find unrefined sugar in the bulk area of a natural food store or try a Hispanic grocery store. Mexican recipes call it piloncillo, and it is usually inexpensive.