

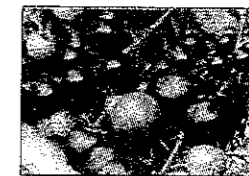
The Oregonian



FOOD *day*

Sweet somethings: Not all cherry tomatoes are created equal. Produce pro Pete Petersen tells which ones to buy and how to enjoy them.

FD6

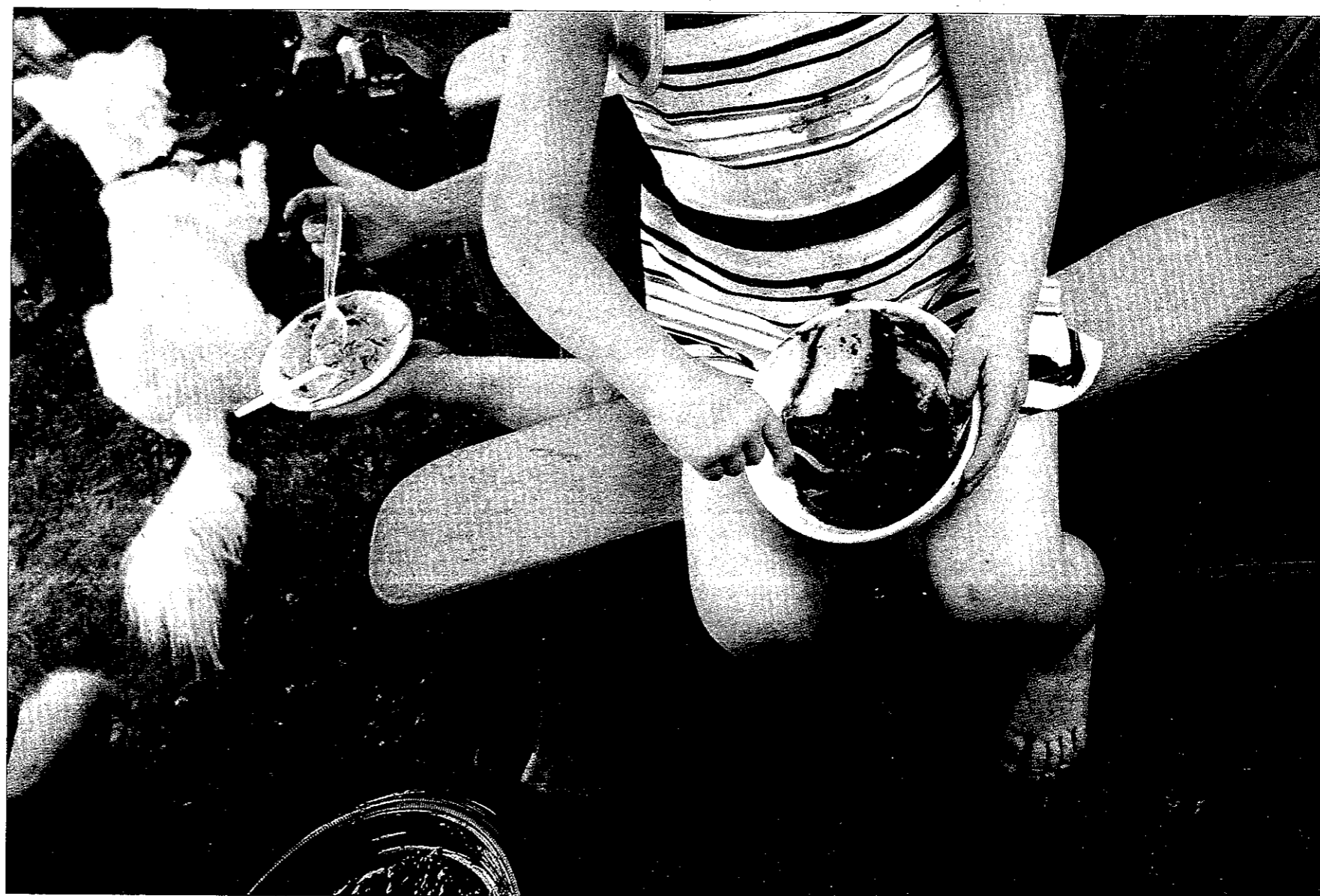


INSIDE
THIS SECTION **FD**
◆ **FOOD TIP**, FD2
◆ **WINE**, FD4
◆ www.foodday.com

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Free homemade ice cream and community spirit attract a crowd at Peninsula Park Commons' annual ice cream social.

Photos by JAMIE FRANCIS THE OREGONIAN

Eli Spevak brings his friends and his community together by cranking up his ice cream machine and dishing out homemade friendship

By **LESLIE COLE**
THE OREGONIAN

For Eli Spevak, community comes by the

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Chill out

Eli Spevak brings his friends and his community together by cranking up his ice cream machine and dishing out homemade friendship

By LESLIE COLE
THE OREGONIAN

For Eli Spevak, community comes by the gallon. Fifty gallons, to be exact, pumped out of his commercial ice cream maker, scooped into cones and dishes, and served on a summer afternoon.

It's been six years since the 34-year-old affordable-housing developer bought the machine and threw his first ice cream social in his North Portland garden for a small group of friends. Now Spevak has moved and the guest

list has grown from a handful to hundreds, but the sweet spirit of friends and strangers mingling over bottomless bowls of ice cream endures.

"It's like you become a kid again," says Caitlin Campbell, 35, who's been to three of the parties in as many years. "I start to jump up and down and when I'm in line—woo hoo! Is it my turn? Is it my turn?"

Husband Dave Heslam — who courted Campbell over quarts of chocolate and fresh banana ice cream from Coffee People — looks

forward to the event for months, so he can get his fill of 20-some flavors with names like Wookiee Cookie (vanilla/chocolate chip cookie), Love Lies Bleeding (raspberry sorbet) and Heath and Joe Get Married (coffee Heath bar crunch). "I pretty much try them all," he says.

So does Spevak, but he's learned over the years how to squeeze the most visiting and ice cream varieties into half a dozen hours. "I tend to walk around with a spoon and mooch off everybody else. That way I get to chat with

Please see **ICE CREAM**, Page FD2



ABOVE: Ellis waits in vain for a lick from owner Hanmi Hubbard's ice cream cone. In addition to hopeful dogs, the party crowd included adults and lots of children.



RIGHT: Andy Matinog and Sara Baldauf-Wagner cool their heels at the ice cream social. Despite the growing number of guests, the party has never run out of ice cream.



Neighbors and friends line up for the potluck at the North Portland co-housing community. The event started six years ago with a handful of guests and has grown to include hundreds.

*What's for dinner tonight?
The latest stop on the endless
quest for weeknight meals*

The power of pancetta

Italy's version of bacon is sweet, nutty and fatty — adding a rich flavor to many dishes

By MATTHEW CARD
SPECIAL TO THE OREGONIAN

Each year, Eli Spevak solicits ideas for ice cream flavors and add-ins to serve at his party. Names lean toward the outrageous rather than the appetizing: Dingleberry, Wookie Cookie and Road Rash.

Ice cream: Friends help out with prep work, flavor naming

Continued from Page F-D1

everyone and I don't have to wait in line," Spevak says. "It's a technique that more people should do."

Not that he objects to a crowd. The lanky, 6-foot-1 Spevak — he balances his ice cream habit with lots of cycling and ultimate Frisbee — tells friends to bring friends, knocks on doors in his Piedmont neighborhood and spreads the word about the free all-you-can-eat ice cream party by e-mail.

This year, he closed off a one-block stretch of street next to Peninsula Park Commons, the condominium complex Spevak shares with five other owners.

Guests come for the cones, but they learn about housing, too

With the mercury hovering around 80 degrees and a forgiving breeze jostling the tomato and strawberry plants in the Commons' container gardens, the afternoon of the social turned out to be perfect for multiple servings of ice cream. A crowd of about 70 friends, neighbors and friends of friends had gathered by 6 p.m., almost all of them busy eating something — scoops of Chocolate Ginger Delight or bites of tomato-mozzarella-basil salad and deviled eggs from the plentiful potluck table.

"This is a beautiful idea, people just hanging out and having a good time," said Theresa Doherty, who grew up in the neighborhood and now lives just across the street. Her friend Rian O'Hara perched on a coveted spot of lawn, enthusiastically polished off a double-decker cone, which he'd doctored with M&M's from the fixings table. "This is Love Lies Bleeding, which is the coolest name for an ice cream flavor I've ever heard," he says, enjoying the raspberry sorbet.

The crowd spans generations (toddlers are in full evidence) and species (several friendly dogs are in attendance, ready to lap up any errant scoops), but thirdsomething adults in flip-flops and Tevas, pig-tails and patterned skirts, straw sun hats and baseball caps constitute the ice-cream socializing majority.

"There's a whole group of folks here interested in co-housing who've come to look inside the units and see what we've done with the common area," Spevak says. This is true of Dennis Kowaleczyk and Xander Patterson, who, in between licks of Pebble Beach, scope out the place. "I'm thinking about talking her into getting on the waiting list for one of the new units," Patterson says.

And then there's Jim Waigand, a prep cook at Carafe bistro and a close friend of Spevak's, who has participated in the frozen dessert

fest for years and played a pivotal role in creating Wookie Cookie, one of the best-loved flavors. "Eli got me this Star Wars cookbook one year, which has standard recipes with Star Wars names and illustrations. Wookie Cookie is basically a recipe for chocolate chip cookies, which I bake and Eli mixes into vanilla ice cream," he explains, eating mint chocolate Oreos with the aid of a "most efficient" ladle he swiped from the common-area cupboard. Surveying the scene around him, he notes that it's the biggest gathering to date. "It's become more diverse as our social circles have expanded."

Despite the swelling numbers, the ice cream, Spevak says, never runs out. "There's always leftovers. I tell people to put a little money in the pot as they take a pint for a potluck."

The party's just an excuse for feeding an obsession

Spevak has loved ice cream (he'll eat any kind, cheap or fancy) since he grew up in Washington, D.C., but didn't start making it until he moved to Portland in 1994. While working for Habitat for Humanity, he met the owners of Rose's Ice Cream restaurant on Northeast Fremont Street and struck a deal: They would teach him to make ice cream, and he would work for free. Or at least, for free waffle cones and the occasional quart.

"It kinda got me hooked," Spevak says. When the shop closed down he bought one of their machines for \$400, and threw in an extra \$75 for the waffle-cone machine and a Hobart triple milkshake mixer. "I really wanted to buy the big machine, but (former owner Rick Castle) sold it to some guy in Ohio," he says.

Once it was hooked up in the mudroom of his old house near Jefferson High School, he started making ice cream in 3-gallon batches at the clip of about 15 minutes per flavor.

The solution was a party. At first it was a simple potluck, but Spevak likes it all the better now that it's grown, he says.

The \$200 or so that comes out of his own pocket each year is a fair price, he says, for the fun. It starts each spring when he sends out a call for flavor nominations.

The ever-changing list blends repeats and new ideas — some inspired and, occasionally, a flop. Mango lime was one. "It just tasted bad," Spevak says. "No one much liked it."

Not so for Ginger Cookies and Cream (crumbled ginger cream cookies and strong ginger tea) or Ginger Delight (studded with bits of candied ginger).

He always makes Rose's Memorial Strawberry ice cream, and Peb-

ble Beach (cinnamon chocolate chip), a sentimental favorite because he invented it while working at Rose's.

And Spevak takes full credit, he says, for "the gross flavor names."

There's Dingleberry (chocolate ice cream with chocolate chips, coconut and walnuts), Salmonella (salmonberry ice cream) and this year's Road Rash (vanilla laced with cherries and crumbled brownies).

He makes all of them at a Portland commercial kitchen, in exchange for occasional use of his machine.

On a recent Tuesday, wearing a hairnet, running shoes and a Dessert First! T-shirt, he arrived shortly after noon, then set to mixing Ziploc bags of chocolate chips, cocoa powder and other add-ins with cartons of commercial ice cream base. He quit making it from scratch, he says, after a batch of chocolate peanut butter turned into a brick. He ticked off the names of four-plus flavors he hoped to finish in time for a 6:30 p.m. ultimate Frisbee game, then set about combining chocolate mix-ins with the cream base and dumping it into what looked like a soft-serve ice cream machine. Fifteen minutes later, Spevak pulled a spigot and out poured the batterlike paste that, with a night in the freezer, would be ice cream.

Recipes, like the names, come from "a lot of winging it," like the year someone suggested apple pie as a flavor. "She made two big apple pies and we just cut it all up and put it in the machine," Spevak says. "I wasn't betting on it, but people liked it a lot."

But the rewards of the ice cream social are sweet well before spoons start scooping on a summer day.

Two groups of friends biked to Sauvie Island to pick berries weeks earlier, and on Sunday before the social, close to a dozen met at Spevak's house to chop candy, measure cocoa powder — and watch "Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory."

"Sometimes community development is pushing papers and financial statements, and working with attorneys and lenders. Sometimes," Spevak says, "it's making ice cream."

Freelance writer Christina Melander contributed to this story.

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tomorrow in science

DISCOVERING WHAT'S IN
Scientists are clamoring to unlock the mysteries caged letters of genetic code — and a new crop of companies that is just as curious.

For dairy-based recipes, such as banana, coconut or chocolate cream pies, cornstarch is the best choice because it gives a more creamy texture. Cook the filling or pudding over medium-low to medium heat, stirring gently but constantly. After adding eggs, bring the mixture to 180 degrees on an instant-read thermometer to assure it will thicken properly.

A few things to remember with cornstarch are:

- ◆ Undercooking will impart a starchy flavor.

- ◆ Overcooking (above 180 degrees) can make fillings or puddings thin out as they cool.

- ◆ Stirring too vigorously can cause the mixture to break down and thin out.

- ◆ Acids can hinder the thickening ability of cornstarch. That's why in many lemon meringue pie recipes, the cornstarch, sugar and water are brought to a boil and thickened before the lemon juice is added.

- ◆ Sauces and fillings made with cornstarch turn spongy when frozen and defrosted. If you plan to freeze a pie or sauce, use instant Clear Jel, tapioca starch, tapioca or arrowroot as a thickener.

Flour power isn't as strong as other thickeners

It takes twice as much flour to equal the thickening power of

cartoonist

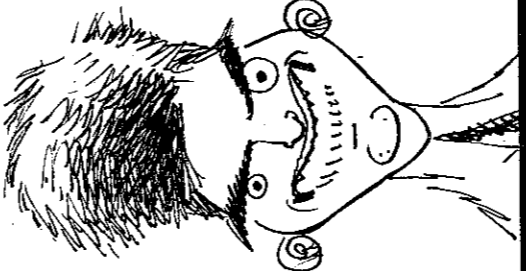
Jack Ohman

Political cartoons that draw you in.

Daily in EDITORIAL

The Oregonian

Practically Indispensable.



Arrowroot comes from a starchy tuber of the same name. Although more expensive than cornstarch and flour, this powder has some advantages:

- ◆ It turns clear when dissolved and has a neutral flavor.

- ◆ It works at a lower temperature than other thickeners.

- ◆ It tolerates acidic ingredients and prolonged cooking better.

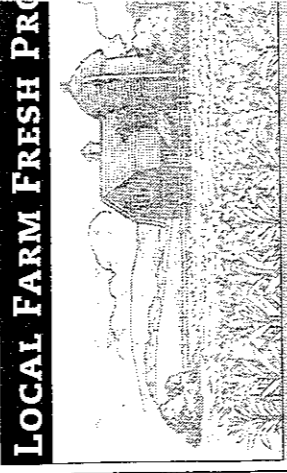
Arrowroot, however, is not a good thickener for dairy-based sauces, because it turns them slimy.

Two teaspoons of arrowroot can be substituted for 1 tablespoon of cornstarch or 2 tablespoons of all-purpose flour. Find arrowroot in the spice section of most supermarkets, or in bulk at Bob's Red Mill and New Seasons.

Clear Jel is the most versatile of all the thickeners

Clear Jel is a modified cornstarch that is used by many commercial bakers in fruit fillings. Unlike ordinary cornstarch, Clear Jel works well with acidic ingredients and tolerates high temperatures.

Clear Jel is an especially good



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