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Entree

Recipes • Cookbooks • Wine



CHRIS PIETSCH/The Register-Guard

Liza Aleksyeyeva (left) from Ukraine, **Effrey Dademo** from Papua New Guinea and **Marketa Visinkova** from the Czech Republic help prepare lunch at the Environmental Law Conference in Eugene.

International flavor

Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide members share knowledge and ethnic cuisine

BY JENNIFER SNELLING
For The Register-Guard

Marketa Visinkova is an environmental attorney in the Czech Republic. At home, she provides legal aid to farmers who are trying to protect their land from industrial pollution, or to citizens who are trying to defend the environment from any number of dangers. She was recently honored in Paris with a prestigious Woman of the Earth award.

Recently, she was in Eugene making dinner with about 30 fellow environmental attorneys and scientists from around the world. She was the head chef directing attorneys from Jamaica and the Netherlands to peel potatoes, and joined attorneys from Canada and Papua New Guinea to chop garlic.

The dish is garlic soup, traditional in her native country. She's meeting many of the other attorneys for the first time, but the camaraderie in the kitchen is easy. There's lots of laughter and everyone is pitching in to help. Despite the language barriers, it's

as if they're all old friends.

In a way they are. These attorneys and scientists have been communicating online, through the Eugene-based network Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide. ELAW is a nonprofit network made up of more than 300 public interest attorneys and scientists from 70 countries, who share information and support each other in their legal battles to protect the environment in their home countries.

ELAW has an annual meeting where members, called amigos, can meet each other, get to know

each other better and enhance their working relationship.

"Before coming to Eugene, you don't know the people, just names. That makes it more difficult to exchange information," Visinkova says. "But eating food that others have prepared from their country brings you closer because you've tasted a part of their culture."

It's quite an undertaking to have the amigos cook dinner for the group.

They are here for only a few short days and go to a whirlwind of meetings. ELAW's annual

meeting is timed to coincide with the Public Interest Environmental Law Conference at the University of Oregon. Having amigos cook also presents some logistical difficulties. The amigos send their shopping lists to the Eugene office ahead of their visit, but sometimes there are ingredients that can't be found in Eugene.

For instance, Effrey Dademo of Papua New Guinea, who works to stop destructive gold-mining in her country, had planned to cook a sago pudding, but there was no sago (a starch from the sago palm) to be found in Eugene.

"I'm eating the food of people from Ukraine and Czech Republic and see how they treasure their local cuisine," she says. "I want to bring the whole of (Papua New Guinea) here and cook it."

Finding the right ingredients isn't the only challenge to cooking for more than 50 people. There's also the cleaning up. The amigos are staying in an old fraternity house near campus. This is the first time that the conference has a kitchen with a dishwasher. That makes cleaning up a lot easier. Staff attorney Jenn

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Environmental Law Conference participants get together for a meal.

ELAW: Scientists, lawyers take to the kitchen

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Gleason says at previous conferences, amigos would begin cooking by 3:30 in the afternoon and someone would be in the kitchen until midnight cleaning up, for all four nights of the conference.

Gleason remembers one year when she was in charge of cooking rice and beans for 50 people. She had to use a large, thin pot, and she burned the rice. She had to go out for more rice, but since they were staying on the coast, that wasn't very easy. When Gleason got back, an amigo from Mexico insisted on taking over the rice cooking. She also burned it.

The cooking can add so much stress that ELAW staff considered having the whole event catered, says ELAW's communications director Maggie Keenan. When they put the idea out to the network, the amigos wouldn't have it. There were plenty of cooks to volunteer, including Andres Pirazzoli of Chile. He was the head chef on the first night of this year's meeting. At home, he is launching a renewable energy program. He made Pastel de Papas y Salmon (a layered casserole with potatoes and salmon).

Mara Bocaletti and Jeanette de Noack, who work to protect the Mesoamerican Reef in Guatemala, made Pepian Chicken and Vegetables (chicken and vegetables with a pumpkin seed sauce)

and Dulce de Leche.

Being head chef meant Pirazzoli was in charge of organizing the volunteers.

"The kitchen was crazy," he says. "Everyone wanted to help. This conference and the cooking are all about friendship and sharing. To be able to satisfy people from China, South America, Europe... it's incredible."

As a compromise, ELAW staff planned to have amigos cook on only two nights of the conference this year.

The second night of cooking, the menu is Visinkova's Garlic Soup, and Ukrainian amigos are making Potato Pancakes With Mushroom Cream Sauce and a fruit salad of oranges, apples, raisins and whipped cream served beautifully in an orange half. An impromptu assembly line forms to fill the oranges with the fruit.

"These people work together on legal and scientific issues, but this is cooking," Keenan says. "They're talking, relaxing, getting to know each other. This helps build the bond. It's a beautiful thing that it happens through cooking."

Garlic Soup (Cesnecka)

- 3 to 4 spring onions, cut in rings (divided)
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 small bulb garlic, crushed (divided)
- 1 liter water
- Salt and pepper

- 2 or 3 potatoes, peeled and cubed
- 2 eggs
- Croutons for serving

Fry half of the onions in olive oil. After 5 minutes add half the garlic and continue to fry, but not too long because it will become bitter. Add water, salt, pepper, the rest of the onion and garlic, and the potatoes. When the potatoes are cooked, gently stir in the eggs, breaking the yolk. Boil for 1 minute. Serve with croutons. Serves 4.

Source: Marketa Visinkova.

Pastel de Papas y Salmon

- 1½ onion
- 3 cloves garlic
- ½ teaspoon dried chili peppers
- ½ stick melted butter (divided)
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- Salt and pepper
- 14 small potatoes (peeled or not, your preference)
- ½ cup milk
- ½ teaspoon chopped rosemary
- 1 salmon fillet
- 1 small jar capers

Dice the onion and chop the garlic. Add the dried chili peppers. Fry in 1 tablespoon of the butter mixed with 2 tablespoons olive oil, add salt and pepper according to taste. If you don't want this too spicy, add less chili. Don't burn this mixture — cook it for about 5 minutes on low.

Make mashed potatoes: Boil the potatoes until soft, drain the water and use a mixer to mash the potatoes with milk,

salt to taste and rosemary.

Butter a casserole pan. Put a very thin layer of mashed potatoes on the bottom (this keeps the salmon from burning). Add the onions in a layer.

On top of that place the sliced salmon and sprinkle with capers. Cover with the rest of the potatoes. Brush with melted butter. Bake at 400 degrees for 20 minutes, until the top is a little brown.

Serves 4 to 8.

Source: Andres Pirazzoli.

Dulche de Leche

- 1 liter (about 4 cups) milk
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 stick cinnamon
- 6 egg yolks (already beaten)
- 4 teaspoons cornstarch
- Peaches (optional)
- Cinnamon

Slowly warm the milk, sugar and cinnamon stick on the stove in a nonstick pot. When it is just boiling, add the egg yolks and cornstarch.

Reduce heat and continue to stir until the mixture begins to thicken; if necessary add more cornstarch. When it reaches the consistency of a pudding, remove it from the heat and pour into a Pyrex dish. Decorate with peach rounds. Sprinkle with cinnamon.

Source: Mara Bocaletti.

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Jennifer Snelling is a freelance writer from Eugene.