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A SMARTER WAY TO EAT

At Cooking for Solutions, you can savor fine food and wine — and discover ways to save the ocean

RANDY TUNNELL — MONTEREY BAY AQUARIUM

MUSIC

Find out who's coming to the Sunset Center next season

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SINGING SENIORS

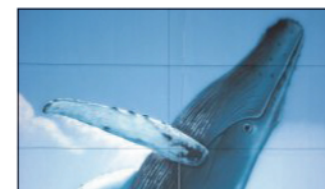
The all-female Choraleers celebrate their 50th anniversary

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ART

Marine life artist Wyland paints with a mission

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See what's happening in local arts and entertainment

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WEEKEND WEATHER**Friday**

High: 69
Low: 30

**Saturday**

High: 62
Low: 52

**Sunday**

High: 62
Low: 51

COVER STORY

EAT RESPONSIBLY

Cooking for Solutions promotes sustainability

By Mike Hale » grubhunter@comcast.net » @thegrubhunter on Twitter

MONTEREY » Brooke Williamson never expected celebrity to become part of her life when she embarked on a decidedly unglamorous culinary career at age 15. But a country's insatiable appetite for food and a head-scratching adoration for reality TV has led to life in the glaring spotlight following Williamson's second-place finish last year on Bravo's "Top Chef."

IF YOU GO

What: 13th annual Cooking for Solutions
When: Friday through Sunday
Where: Monterey Bay Aquarium and various other locations
Tickets/information: cookingforsolutions.org

"It's important for every chef to take a stand and pay attention to what creates sustainability in our world."

— Brooke Williamson, chef

"I'm feeling more and more comfortable, but I don't think I'll ever get completely used to it," she said.

Williamson is among a bevy of celebrity chefs invited to participate in the 13th Cooking for Solutions, a three-day event where an eager public can rub elbows with the chef world, savor fine food and wine, and discover ways to save the oceans by living more sustainably.

The groundbreaking gathering of like-minded chefs, winemakers, purveyors, scientists and businesses takes place at the world-renowned Monterey Bay Aquarium and remote locations. It kicks off Friday with the opening-night gala (more than 90 participating restaurants, 60 wineries and 11 craft breweries nestled amongst the aquarium galleries), and continues through the weekend with intimate Food & Wine Adventures, cooking demos and special events such as a Street Food Extravaganza at the Monterey Plaza Hotel, and a decadent Saturday night dessert party with Food Network star Alton Brown.

"Cooking for Solutions is such a phenomenal program, and I am honored to be a part of it," Williamson said. "It's important for every chef to take a stand and pay attention to what creates sustainability in our world."

Williamson is quite familiar with Cooking for Solutions and the event's benefactor, the Seafood Watch program. She's also a frequent visitor to Monterey because her husband and restaurant partner Nick Roberts grew up here, the son of David and Christine Armanasco.

"You could say that Monterey is our favorite city," she said.

The couple own and operate two gourmet-leaning gastropubs, The Tripel in Playa del Rey and Hudson House in Redondo Beach (with another restaurant, Playa Provisions, set to open later this year in Playa del Rey).

Williamson is a self-taught chef who started her career as a teacher's assistant at the Epicurean Institute of Los Angeles. At age 18, she started working as a pastry assistant at Fenix at the

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COURTESY OF MURPHY O'BRIEN PUBLIC RELATIONS
Carmel Valley Ranch Executive Chef Tim Wood.



COURTESY PHOTO BY SUSAN SABO PHOTOGRAPHY
Brooke Williamson and Nick Roberts.

Cooking

FROM PAGE 2

Argyle Hotel until renowned chef Ken Frank invited her to work on the savory side of the kitchen. After a brief internship at the celebrated Daniel in New York, she returned to Los Angeles as executive chef at Boxer and later Zax in Brentwood, heralded by The Los Angeles Times as a “culinary wunderkind.”

Growing up in Carmel, Roberts spent his formative years at his family’s Carmel Valley Durney Vineyards. He graduated from The California Culinary Academy in San Francisco, and headed to New York to work in such acclaimed restaurants as Union Pacific, Ducasse and Café Boulud.

He returned home to work in the kitchens of the Highlands Inn, including participation in the Masters of Food and Wine. Roberts met Williamson while working together at Zax, where they learned the concepts of American bistro cuisine.

Williamson and Roberts run their restaurants with a “simple is better” motto. The couple will host a burger-themed barbecue with craft beer on Saturday at Carmel Valley Ranch (11 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.). The chefs have created the ultimate pub-style burger dubbed The Tripel: a combination of duck confit, pork and aged beef with surprising toppings.

Carmel Valley Ranch’s Executive Chef Tim Wood will create inspiring side dishes with produce from the ranch’s onsite organic gardens. Wood and Ranch gardener Mark Marino share a passion for the land, and it shows in the heirloom and artisanal approach to the produce and ultimately the menus. The Ranch has its own salt house that produces small-batch sea salts, and Wood sources from its vast lavender fields and hives from 125,000 Italian honey bees.

Wood’s food takes on a very personal taste and em-



COURTESY PHOTOS BY RANDY WILDER — MONTEREY BAY AQUARIUM

Guests enjoy the view off the Monterey Bay Aquarium’s decks at the 2013 Cooking For Solutions Gala.



A selection from last year’s Cooking For Solutions Gala at the Monterey Bay Aquarium.

bodies what is unique and special about Carmel Valley. And he loves to share his experiences with other chefs.

“It’s always so fun to meet other chefs and collaborate,” said Wood, a member of Seafood Watch’s Blue Ribbon

Task Force, a panel of influential leaders in the culinary community committed to innovative outreach to promote sustainable seafood.

“Task force members are thought leaders with the ability to change the way we

think and act about food,” said Sheila Bowman, manager of culinary and strategic initiatives for Seafood Watch. “With their insight and influence Seafood Watch can better engage the culinary community, and further inspire

consumers and businesses to make informed choices in the seafood they consume and source.”

Wood has long been a proponent of sustainability, since working on the East Coast and watching the overfished Chilean seabass dwindle in alarming numbers.

“A lot of it has to do with marketing and what the consumer wants,” he said. “A few years ago you could get black cod (sablefish) for a few dollars a pound because no one had heard of it. Then Nobu (the iconic New York restaurant run by Japanese-born chef Nobu Matsuhisa) starts using it (black cod with miso became a signature dish) and everyone wants it. It’s now \$14 a pound.”

Wood uses local fisherman Jerry Wetle to source his seafood, and Wood loves using so-called “trash” fish, product that is often by-catch and certainly less desirable ... but still delicious.

Wood believes there are plenty of other fish in the sea (such as herring, sardines and mackerel), so why aren’t we eating them?

Because 70 percent of all seafood is purchased through restaurants, Seafood Watch (which has distributed more than 40 million pocket guides and 1 million smartphone apps) long ago tuned to chefs to help raise consumer awareness.

“As chefs it’s our responsibility to help lead the way and show people what’s available and what’s sustainable ... and what’s delicious,” he said.

As for the diner’s role: “Sometimes you may end up paying a little more, but eat it, enjoy it and feel good that you are helping,” he said.