

Local Chef Hopes to Help Friend, Honor Traditional Foods

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Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

Chef Joel Chenet is known for his elaborate dinners and gourmet catering. But this weekend he'll be cooking for a cause rather close to his heart, with a meaningful menu.

Chenet said his good friend, Herman Squartsoff, was recently diagnosed with stomach cancer, and it seemed only right to hold a fundraising dinner on his behalf.

"The Squartsoff family is one of the first families of Native people that I met on Kodiak in 2000. His brother, in Port Lions, we went hunting together, I get my first deer with him, with Melvin Squartsoff. And then I met Pete and I got my first king salmon with Pete. And over the year we talked about Native people and the old tradition of how they used to go from village to village in small, small skiff. So it was very interesting and we talked a lot about Native food. So I got very interested in that."

Chenet, a professionally trained chef from France, said the Squartsoff family helped open his eyes to a new kind of cooking — using local plants and animals and preparing meals in traditional ways. Because of this, he said Saturday's fundraising dinner will feature the local foods and techniques that Herman Squartsoff and his family introduced to Chenet.

"Yea you know it's always experimenting with the local food instead of looking like oh we used to do it like this and like that. Well, these people, the only thing they had were a pot with water and stones boiling to cook food. And I tried that, actually, it's quite amazing to boil water with rocks and cook food. I did it at home and I did it on the beach one time when we were on a hunting trip. You know same with taking a flat rock and putting it on the fire and cook a salmon you just caught 20 minutes before that. It's just awesome."

The menu includes Ouzinkie cod soup with smoked salmon dumplings, wild berries barbeque salmon and Caesar salad with tanner crab and a local scallop dressing, among other Kodiak delicacies. Chenet said he hopes folks will come enjoy some of the island's gourmet bounty, and help support a community member in need.

The Herman Squartsoff Fundraising Dinner will be Saturday at 7 p.m. at the Kodiak Baptist Mission with hors d'oeuvres starting at 6:30 p.m. Tickets are \$40 per guest and include multiple courses, desserts and Mill Bay coffee. You can pick up tickets at Ton of Fun and Mill Bay Coffee.