

Coming up: Fernwood Bites

by [Ellie Shortt](#) on Apr 27, 2012 • 9:28 am



Far left: Buckwheat pancake with morel mushrooms & cured and smoked trout with homemade sodas (black tea, steeped with lavender and lemon balm) from Devour Food and the end of La Piola's table. Right: Fernwood Bites organizer Mila Czemerys (left) and Dave Segal (right) partaking in some ice cold Blue Buck Beer by Phillips Brewery. All photos by Willie Li

To some of you the name “Funky Junky Fernwood” may ring a bell. But approximately seven years ago, what was once perhaps a less reputable part of Victoria has now blossomed into one of the most cultured and friendly areas of the city. The change is thanks in part to Fernwood NRG (**Neighbourhood Resource Group Society**), a social enterprising non-profit organization run by and for the residents of the neighbourhood who first purchased the Cornerstone building in August 2005, and then transformed the space into affordable housing for families. Since then they have expanded to include more affordable housing undertakings in addition to childcare and family programs, employment opportunity sourcing and other projects with the goal of raising the value of living in the Fernwood area.

Of course, one of the best ways of building neighbourly relationships is through the connecting power of food, and one of Fernwood NRG's biggest and well-attended fundraisers is based upon edible enjoyments. On June 24, this organization will be holding the 3rd annual [Fernwood Bites](#) event, showcasing the gastronomic talents of Fernwood businesses as well as other local eateries and chefs from around southern Vancouver Island. Mila Czemerys, who helps organize this event, recognizes the integral part food has played in the growth of the Fernwood community. She sees an event like Fernwood Bites as the perfect way of bringing people together and raising funds, while at the same time showcasing some of the talented members of the Fernwood Community. “It all started with the Cornerstone Café,” she reminisces, “which sort of became the neighbourhood living room. Then, around the same time, the Fernwood Inn got started, and then Stage after that, which really solidified Fernwood as a foodie Mecca. And of course where there's good food, artists and musicians follow, and that's really how Fernwood transitioned into the vibrant neighbourhood that it is now.”



Blackberry cream tart with strawberry mint from Wildfire Bakery

The event runs for two and a half hours in Fernwood Square and has sold out the last two years. For a \$50 ticket, guests are able to sample an unlimited array of food and drink from some of Victoria's greatest talents, and with a firm cap on 300 attendees, this intimate event gives both vendors and guests the opportunity to get to know each other through more face-to-face interactions than they might have otherwise had in a restaurant setting. "This is a great opportunity for us to showcase all the cool aspects of Fernwood," says Mike Colwill, owner of the [Fernwood Inn](#). "This is a unique community and I love seeing people fall in love with the different tastes of our square – it's great to engage with them on a personal level."

Not only is this a great event for businesses to interact with patrons both new and old, but because Fernwood invites vendors from outside of the neighbourhood, it's also a wonderful opportunity for strengthening ties within the local food scene as a whole. Torin Egan, head chef of [The Superior](#), participated in the event last year and is reminded of a particularly great relationship that came from his neighbouring vendor. "Last year we were situated beside [Sea Cider](#) and just through chatting with them at the event, we were able to begin a great working relationship that we continue to uphold today. I look forwards to seeing what other relationships will come out of this year's event."



Linley Faulkner with her mini latte by award winning Barista Rob Kettner of the Fernwood Coffee Company

Though a great event to build awareness and funds for the Fernwood neighbourhood, Jena Steward of [Devour](#), a participant in the event since the beginning, adds that this is a great opportunity for overall growth in the Victoria food community. "Victoria isn't all that big, however we see its food scene growing, and that means creating a widespread network of food makers and consumers. I think if we are all to succeed, a 'coming together' of those of us in the industry is essential, no matter where the event is being held. I love the idea of a citywide food culture!"

Tickets have been on sale since April 10th and are available at www.fernwood.ca, with all proceeds going to support Fernwood NRG.