

# ANNUAL The Santa Cruz Chocolate Festival gives visitors a taste of the sweet life

# INDULGENCE



This chocolate and marshmallow Marini's treat comes on a stick for mobile enjoyment.

BILL LOVEJOY/SENTINEL

*Events*

*1-18-12*



Yanira Cruz of Marini's Candies cuts up a fresh batch of spicy mango bark Saturday at the store's wharf kitchen.

BILL LOVEJOY/SENTINEL

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## SANTA CRUZ

**I**t takes a bit of culinary daring to figure out which meats make tasty treats when dipped in chocolate.

Professional candy makers Nick and Gino Marini are among those risk-takers, and they'll share their chocolate creations at the fifth annual Santa Cruz Chocolate Festival on Sunday.

Marini's Candies, Santa Cruz's oldest candy company, dates to 1915, when barber Victor Marini accepted a customer's offer and bought his popcorn stand at the Beach Boardwalk. Then came taffy, caramel corn and candy apples, and eventually other generations of Marinis. The

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The jumbled mound of rocky road chocolate candy at Marini's is a customer favorite.

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# CHOCOLATE

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still-family-owned business now offers a variety of hand-dipped nut clusters and caramels, turtles, English toffee, rocky road, chocolate-dipped strawberries and homemade fudge. There are four stores — two still at the Boardwalk, one on the Municipal Wharf and the fourth on Pacific Avenue.

The brothers today venture into some creative spaces using their versatile “chocolate bark,” a sheet of carefully tempered, high-quality chocolate that can be mixed with virtually anything a chocolatier can imagine. Marini’s on Sunday will serve up some of their most prized barks, made with such ingredients as dried mango, almonds, peppermint candy canes in white chocolate, and adventurous doses of spicy chili. They’ll also offer several varieties of their unlikely but now famous chocolate-dipped bacon. The brothers have garnered national attention for the creation.

Marini’s and 26 other candy companies will offer their most delectable chocolate-based treats at the fifth annual festival, which runs 1-4 p.m. at the Cocoanut Grove. The event, organized by the UC Santa Cruz Women’s Club, raises scholarship funds for re-entry college students, said festival coordinator Ann Berry-Kline, of the women’s club.

For many candy shops, the Santa Cruz Chocolate Festival is a great venue to showcase what’s new and interesting, said Marini’s warehouse manager Melissa Flores. It was at the first festival that Marini’s introduced their chocolate-dipped bacon to the public. This year Marini’s is toying with introducing a salt and pepper chocolate bark, Flores said.

While chocolate bacon put Marini’s in the national spotlight last year when it was featured on the History channel’s “Modern Marvels” program, Marini’s Munchies on the wharf manager Jill Vecchione said the crowd at last year’s festival made a rush for the company’s spicy dark-chocolate mango bark, which will be featured again this year. Another hit last year was their chocolate-dipped Oreos covered in butterscotch chips, which could make their way back to the festival as well.

Chocolate bacon remains Marini’s current big hit, though, mostly because of its novelty.

“The bacon has a certain degree of shock value that draws people’s attention,” said Nick Marini, a fourth generation co-owner along with his brother Gino. “We’re going to have several variations of the chocolate-covered bacon: our spicy one, the maple-covered chocolate bacon, and the regular milk chocolate-covered bacon.”

The chocolate-covered bacon starts with top-quality bacon, which is cooked until all the fat disappears so it gets a crunchy texture. It is then dipped in a tub of liquid chocolate at Marini’s Munchies. Customers can watch the dipping process through a glass window near the counter.

The brothers have experimented with dipping all kinds of things into chocolate, Nick Marini said.

## AT A GLANCE

### FIFTH ANNUAL SANTA CRUZ CHOCOLATE FESTIVAL

**WHAT:** Fine chocolate tastings at festival that raises money for scholarships for re-entry college students.

**WHEN:** Sunday, 1-4 p.m.

**WHERE:** Cocoanut Grove at the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk, 400 Beach St., Santa Cruz

**COST:** Tasting tickets \$12 in advance, \$15 at the door. Tickets can be purchased in advance at Whole Foods Market in Santa Cruz and Capitola, Bookshop Santa Cruz, Norrie’s Gift Shop and Bay Tree Bookstore on the UC Santa Cruz campus, or online at festival site.

**DETAILS:** [www.santacruzchocolatefestival.org](http://www.santacruzchocolatefestival.org)

### MARINI’S CANDIES

■ Marini’s Candies, 1308 Pacific Ave., Santa Cruz. Call 423-3299

■ Marini’s at the Wharf, 55 Municipal Wharf, Suite A, Santa Cruz. Call 425-7341.

■ Marini’s At the Beach (two locations) at the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk, 400 Beach St. Call 423-7258.

**WEBSITE:** [www.mariniscandies.com](http://www.mariniscandies.com)

“We figured we might as well dip some meat, too,” he said. “We tried a teriyaki beef jerky dipped in chocolate but that didn’t work as well. There’s just something about bacon.”

At last year’s festival there were problems with overcrowding, Ann Berry-Kline said, but this year the club has expanded the event by a third.

“Space has always been kind of an issue, and in the past it’s gotten so overcrowded to the point where people were very unhappy,” she said.

Last year the festival hosted about 1,200 people, she said.

This year, in addition to the Cocoanut Grove Ballroom and Bay View Room, the festival will use the Sun Room, she said.

“There will be a lot more elbow room,” Berry-Kline said.

She estimates the fest will be able to comfortably accommodate up to 1,500 people.

New to the festival this year will be a do-it-yourself cupcake decorating class, she said. Festival-goers also will see the return of the silent auction that has been absent for the past two years. Bid items include certificates to local restaurants, admission to yoga courses, artwork, and four tickets to a San Francisco Giants game a few rows above the dugout, including VIP parking passes.

To help keep things hopping, there will also be a live jazz band.

Over the last five years the Santa Cruz Chocolate Festival has raised more than \$50,000.

“It’s really a festival that everyone wants to go to because almost everyone loves chocolate,” Berry-Kline said. “There’s this real wonderful air of excitement and fun.”