

WESTFIELD FOOD 4 THOUGHT

Pumpkin Parfait – The Best Way



By JAYNE SALOMON
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

What could be better than a Thanksgiving dessert that is easy to prepare, full of delicious fall sweets and is appealing to the eye as well?

This pumpkin parfait meets all these criteria and is quite an impressive-looking dish that can be put together in about 15 minutes. It makes a wonderful presentation either at your own holiday table or as a contribution to the Thanksgiving feast you're attending as a guest.

I like to give my hostess the trifle dish along with the crowd-pleasing dessert as a hostess gift. The versatile trifle dish can be found at Bed, Bath & Beyond, Target and most large retailers, as well as kitchen stores, for as little as \$10 and can be used to create many different colorful desserts, entrees and snacks.

The following includes a recipe for corn bread, but to save time store-bought corn bread will do just as well.

cloves and vanilla pudding powder. Stir well. In a separate mixing bowl, combine the cream cheese with the whipped cream and sugar and mix until well blended. Layer half of the pumpkin mixture on top of the corn bread layer. Then layer half of the cream mixture on top. Repeat. Sprinkle top with coconut and crushed walnuts and chill for at least 30 minutes before serving.

CORN BREAD

INGREDIENTS

- ¾ cup enriched corn meal
- 1-1/4 cup all-purpose flour
- ¼ cup sugar
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 package (approximately 3.4 ounces) instant vanilla pudding powder.
- 1 cup half & half
- ¼ cup vegetable oil
- 2 eggs
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract

PROCEDURE

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. In a large mixing bowl, combine the corn meal, flour, sugar, baking powder salt and vanilla pudding powder. Add the half & half, vegetable oil, eggs and vanilla extract. Mix until well blended and pour into a greased 8- or 9-inch baking pan. Bake for 20 to 25 minutes.



Pumpkin Parfait

PUMPKIN PARFAIT

INGREDIENTS

- 1 corn bread (approximately 8" by 8")
- 1 large can (approximately 30-ounces) pure pumpkin
- ¼ cup half & half
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cloves
- 1 box (approximately 3.4 ounces) instant vanilla pudding powder
- 1 large (12 ounces) tub whipped cream cheese
- 2 cups whipped cream (from whipped cream can)
- 1/3 cup sugar
- 1 tablespoon shredded coconut
- 2 tablespoons crushed walnuts

PROCEDURE

Break the corn bread into pieces and place half in the bottom of the trifle bowl. In a mixing bowl, combine the pumpkin, half & half, cinnamon,



ALL EYES ON YOU...Scotch Plains resident Tyler O. stands by some of his photographs, recently on display at the Montclair Library. Tyler is a student at The Children's Institute, (TCI) a school for children with autism and learning and emotional disabilities, and was one of the students to participate in the S.E.E. (Special Eyes on the Environment) photography program.



COPING...The Home Life/Social Services Department of Woman's Club of Westfield recently hosted a program on Gilda's club, an organization dedicated to helping cancer patients, their families and their friends cope with this illness. Shown here are, from left to right, Executive Director Mary Connolly and volunteer Ann Fried. Gilda's Club is studying the possibility of opening a center in the Livingston area.



THEY EAT THEIR WORDS...Wardlaw-Hartridge Lower School librarian Christine Mozlin reported that the school's fifth-grade after-school book club held its first meeting of the year. Almost 20 fifth graders met to discuss "The Word Eater" by Mary Amato. "As we munched on 'dirt' and gummy worms, we discussed the story and what we would do if we had Fig, the word-eating worm," Ms. Mozlin said. Above, Alexandre Barbet of Plainfield and Douglas Cerninero of Scotch Plains find the gummy worms and 'dirt' to be a delicious way to reflect on the book's themes.

Student Readings Kick Off 2007 Premiere Festival

UNION – Premiere Stages at Kean University will hold its annual Premiere Student Readings on Wednesday and Thursday, December 6 and 7, at 7:30 p.m. in the Murphy Dunn Theatre in Vaughn-Eames Hall at Kean University.

The plays represent the work of Kean University playwrighting students, and the public is encouraged to actively engage in the new play development process.

Evaluation forms will be distributed, and patrons may participate in post-reading dialogues with the writers. The readings feature a cast of students and Actors' Equity Association professionals, and John Pietrowski, artistic director of Playwrights Theatre in Madison, directs them.

The mission of the Premiere Stages Play Festival is to encourage and nurture emerging dramatists in New Jersey and the greater metropolitan area.

The Premiere Student Readings allow student playwrights to explore their work in front of an audience and discover the strengths and weaknesses inherent in their scripts.

"The public is afforded the unique opportunity to see new plays in a developmental forum and make suggestions and recommendations to the playwrights," said John Wooten, producing artistic director of Premiere Stages. "Our patrons are an integral part of the process. The aim of the festival is to empower writers to make the transition from page to stage, and the audience is crucial in helping them make that leap."

Admission and parking for the Kean Student Readings is free. Kean University is located at 1000 Morris Avenue in Union. For more information, visit kean.edu/premierestages or call (908) 737-4092.

WHS Student to Perform With Dancers in Nutcracker

WESTFIELD – Allison Sharkey of Westfield will join world-renowned dancers when she appears in the soloist roles of Arabian and Marzipan in this year's full-length production of New Jersey Dance Theatre Ensemble's *The Nutcracker*.

Internationally acclaimed dancers Clifford Williams, Jessica Batten, Pedro Ruiz, Iyun Harrison, Jason McDole, Rosemary Sabovick-Bleich and Joseph Fritz will join the ensemble for three performances only at the Wilkins Theatre at Kean University, located on 1000 Morris Avenue in Union on Saturday, December 2, at 2 and 7 p.m., and Sunday, December 3, at 2 p.m.

Allison, the daughter of James and Lisa Sharkey of Westfield, and a junior at Westfield High School, will also dance other roles in the performances.

Allison has danced with New Jersey Dance Theatre Ensemble since 2000, and has previously appeared in the roles of BonBon, Soldier, Angel, Party Girl, Chinese and Spanish.

The Ensemble's Artistic Director, Nancy Turano, choreographs this 37th annual production of *The Nutcracker*, set to the classic music of Peter Tchaikovsky, and features dancers aged seven through 19. Allison will be joined in this production by Westfield

dancers Allison Ammermuller, Catherine Bruno, Elizabeth Engel, Kristy Grawehr, Maggie McKay, Megan Sharkey and Emma Williams.

Tickets are \$30 for the public, \$25 for seniors and \$20 for students and children. For more information, call the Wilkins Theatre box office at (908) 737-7469 or log on to keanstage.com.



Allison Sharkey

POPCORN™
Stranger Than Fiction
For Whom the Belles Lettres Toll



By MICHAEL S. GOLDBERGER
3 popcorns

In *Stranger Than Fiction*, actor Will Ferrell plays the protagonist in more ways than one. First of all, he's just plain Harold Crick, mild-mannered auditor for the IRS. And then again, he is Harold Crick, the central character of famed reclusive author Kay Eiffel's long-awaited novel.

Now, this mightn't be too disconcerting for our numbers-obsessed accountant if it weren't for the fact that the author, smartly played by Emma Thompson, is planning something very special for the poor fellow. Her tragic heroes, by very definition, must, well, it's the noted writer's trademark.

And so it will be for Harold Crick. That is, unless he has something to say about it.

Ordinarily, he wouldn't have a clue as to his fate. However, through the magic of Zach Helm's creative fiction as woven here by director Marc Forster, Harold gets a heads up whilst walking to work one day.

The voice seems to come from the Heavens: "This is a story about a man named Harold Crick and his wrist-watch." It then proceeds to detail and critically bemoan each and every moment of Harold's boring, carefully regimented and predictable life, right down to the number of steps he neutrally counts as he crosses the street.

"Did you hear that?" he asks the woman next to him. But of course she doesn't. Such filmic fantasies require that the main character is deemed crazy by those around him (see "Topper" [1937]). In fact, even Harold has to doubt his sanity, at least for a while. Otherwise, it's just no fun.

In any case, time passes and Harold goes about his business. He even gets somewhat used to the annoyance. Until the day when he hears, "Little does he know that his own tragic death is imminent."

Now, this isn't funny. Well, at least not for Harold. She (the narrator, or whoever she is) hasn't been wrong yet. But what truly lends dramatic irony to the message of doom is that, after several chapters of hearing how truly purposeless his mundane existence is, our boy has, at long last, found a reason to live. And her name is Miss Pascal (Maggie Gyllenhaal).

True, their first couple of meetings haven't been very cordial. But then you have to consider the circumstances. You see, Harold has been auditing the pretty young baker. Still, you don't have to be a hopeless romantic to see where this is going.

So, what's a doomed character to do?

A visit to the shrink bears no fruit. Yet happily, the doc's suggestion to see someone who knows something about writing leads us to the film's great little literary conceit, and another fine character portrayal by Dustin Hoffman.

He is Jules Hilbert, semi-disassociated but nonetheless esteemed professor of belles lettres. And zanier than the nature of the referral itself, the ivory tower scholar is hardly shocked by Harold's plight. Rather, when he isn't immediately sure just who it is that has so put Harold's destiny into a tumult, his vanity is alerted.

Hence, the professor instructs that, to narrow the field of possible authors, Mr. Crick must first ascertain whether he's in a comedy or a tragedy. He's to keep a tally of events, both happy and sad.

All of which offers Mr. Ferrell the chance that practically all good clowns hope to tackle in their careers. And that is to trot out the serious side of their Pagliacci.

The result hardly approaches Jackie Gleason's tour de force as Minnesota Fats in *The Hustler* (1961) or Jerry Lewis's portrayal of Jerry Langford in *The King of Comedy* (1983). But for the seriocomic purposes here, his sad sack in search of a silver lining is entertainingly adequate.

Far more than passable, on the other hand, and supplying important credence to the overall chimera is Emma Thompson's passionately tormented scribe. She's not too bad a comedian herself.

Tired, distraught, ludicrously obsessed with suicide and doing just about everything to sustain a stereotype of the egocentric artist, Kay is at an impasse: How to kill off Harold Crick? She hardly needs the added moral dilemma his actual existence would mean.

Suffice it to note, the metaphors abound, the literary allusions run gloriously rampant. But it matters not whether you're a member of the literati searching for some heady inside jokes or someone just looking to have his funny bone tickled and heartstrings pulled. In either case, you can make book on *Stranger than Fiction's* uncommonly funny truths.

Stranger Than Fiction, rated PG-13, is a Sony Pictures Entertainment release directed by Marc Forster and stars Emma Thompson, Will Ferrell and Dustin Hoffman. Running time: 113 minutes



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