

A gingerbread masterpiece

By Stephanie Foster

Wed Dec 03, 2008, 03:28 PM EST



Stephanie Foster
Chef Anthony Cole oversees Brian Erskine.

CHATHAM - What do the Chatham Squire, the Wellfleet Drive-In and the Mayflower Shop have in common? You can find them all at the Chatham Bars Inn, gingerbread versions, that is. For many years, the inn has produced an elaborate gingerbread replica of itself. This year, the inn has outdone itself, thanks to executive chef Anthony Cole and his staff of merry culinary helpers. Fifteen gingerbread landmarks, and a miniature Polar Express train are on display in the hotel's lobby. Drop by in the afternoon and enjoy free cookies and cider. Santa will be there Saturdays, and there will be other children's events as well, including a Teddy Bear Tea on Dec. 6. (Go to www.chathambarsinn.com for details.) "I've seen it done in other hotels around the country," said Cole as he watched three of his chefs trim and decorate a replica of St. Christopher's Church. "The general manager was extremely enthusiastic. And the rooms director helped us with trains, tracks, designs and layout. He is a train buff." Cole thinks the train, which circles the 20x16 foot display, is essential. "It's like a magnet for kids," he said. The extravaganza includes the hardware store, lighthouse, water towers, Eldridge Public Library, and railroad museum. The Wellfleet Drive-In has been recreated complete with live movie screen! "We had the help of engineering," said Cole. The theater features a workable 9-inch plasma television as the movie screen. The purchase, along with the railroad tracks, was considered an investment and will be used in future displays. The project began with a trip downtown to measure and photograph the landmarks. It took some finesse with a calculator to scale everything to the Lilliputian proportions of one inch of gingerbread for every 45 inches of real life. Don't get excited about munching on this work of art, however. Cole said the recipe is sturdy but inedible. "It's not what you would use to make gingerbread cookies at home. It's stiffer and we use a lot of ginger so it will smell good." Cole estimates it took about 140 man-hours to complete the project. "Everyone has worked on it nonstop for the last three weeks. We spent three days building the frames of the houses. A lot of people have pitched in, about 15 to 20. That was the point in the beginning. The only way to accomplish it. To do something big and together. We had a great time. The whole staff wrapped around it. It also showcases the talent that is here. One person made marzipan figures, another put the shingles on. The pastry chef did the finish work. Some of us have children and will bring them in to see it. We want everyone to come in to see it."

If you go: The gingerbread village complete with the Polar Express miniature train will be on public display at Chatham Bars Inn on Shore Road in Chatham throughout the holiday season. In addition the inn will offer two "Design & Build Your Own Gingerbread House Workshops" on Dec. 6 and 13 from 10 to 11:30 a.m. Each parent/child team will be provided with everything needed to build and decorate their own house after a demonstration by the chef. The cost is \$25 per house. Reservations are required.