

A culinary tour with a historical twist

Delicious food paired with fascinating stories — Taste deTours offers an exploration of Guelph's downtown



Ouderkirk and Taylor, on Wyndham Street, offers corned beef, cheese and root beer to the Taste deTours groups.

Going “To The Core” with Lynn Broughton of Guelph’s Taste deTours is a bit like being shown around by a chatty friend with great connections and an amazing wealth of knowledge.

Tourists get a flavour of the city’s food and history; longtime residents get to peek behind the scenes of their favourite haunts — they’ll meet bakers and juice-makers, learn how restaurants were built and hear a story or two about Guelph’s lively past, from the historic founding of Guelph to the shady dealings at the Albion Hotel during prohibition. And, of course, they’ll be stuffed with so much delicious cheese and apps and sweets and snacks, it’ll feel like Thanksgiving.

Broughton is Taste deTours, a company offering culinary and cultural tours of downtown Guelph. A Guelph resident for more than 20 years, she is also a longtime advocate for the city’s core. For eight years, she worked in marketing, communications and event planning for the Downtown Guelph Business Association and, before that, in restaurants and as a bookseller, among other jobs, downtown.



“I’ve very much been walking about downtown for 20 years,” says Broughton. “If I leave downtown Guelph, it means I’m leaving town.”

Businesses know her as an enthusiastic supporter and trust her to tell their stories on the tour. But the connections she’s made show in other ways as well. She’ll make sure to stop and say hello to regulars on the street and ask a friend how they’re doing. And she’ll point out where she loved to get lunch when she worked nearby and which restaurant has the most interesting bathrooms.

Taste deTours is about “really just trying to diffuse my own enthusiasm about all this,” she says. “I just think our downtown is brilliant and fascinating and chock full of history and creativity and I want to show people that.”

Broughton stumbled on the food tour business a year ago. A friend heard a speech on food tours and thought the business, with its focus on food, culture, local business and history, would be perfect for Broughton. Broughton had only been on one food tour before, “but then suddenly that was all I wanted to do. I’ve since been

on some in Toronto and Chicago and Montreal just this past year,” she said. “It’s just a fantastic way to get to know a city.”

Broughton signed up for a course run by the Chicago Food Planet for Pros to learn how to run her own tour. When she returned, she got to work coming up with names, building a website and approaching businesses. By the time she was ready to start, it was October — not the traditional season for a culinary tour, but, she says, “I was sort of unwilling to let 2015 go.” So she launched anyway.

Since then, her tours have had steady attendance. Cold weather doesn’t seem to dampen enthusiasm, although it helps that the To The Core tour starts with hot chocolate and sausage rolls (chocolate croissants for the vegetarians) from Eric the Baker.

“Even on Valentine’s, it was -25 out and we were walking around,” she says. “That was another thing that made me think, besides mainly being determined to just start something and at least try, I knew we were Canadian and we can handle it.”

Broughton has written a “script,” but she follows it loosely and adds her own thoughts and anecdotes. At the beginning of the tour, she points out the stone carvings on old city hall. They were sculpted by Matthew Bell, whose work can be found around Guelph. The one in the middle, she says, is Father Time. The one on the left, she’s not so sure about, but it appears to be a bedraggled version of the first one. “That’s Father Time coming out of the shower,” she says.

To prepare, Broughton gathered stories from shops and restaurants, pored over books in the library, visited museums and met with some of Guelph’s historians and

archivists, including author David Knight. She went on a walk with Knight just before launching the tour “and I just hurriedly scribbled down things that he would say.” Some of his knowledge has been incorpo-

rated into the tour, including the location of one of Canada’s first penny nickelodeons. “Sweetie, what exactly was it that George Sleeman did?” or whatever,” she says. “He seems to know everything, so that’s handy for me.”

His knowledge shows when the group stops at Mijijidaa Café and Bistro for herbed bannock with butter and roasted piri piri squash with blue cheese yogurt dip. Mijijidaa, she explained, means “Let’s eat” in Ojibwa. She went on to explain that the Guelph area was the traditional territory of the Attawandaron people.

Throughout the tour, guests are treated to an assortment of foods and locales. At Atmosphere Café, the tour sits down at a table for a club sandwich and salad, but at Guelph Caribbean Cuisine, guests munch on doubles, a dish of curried chickpeas between two pieces of fried flatbread, and sip ginger beer on stools. At Ouderkirk and Taylor, visitors taste cheeses and corned beef from behind the counter.

It’s all about providing new experiences. “Even the locals that think they know everything about their downtown or they’ve been to all the places that are on my tour, there’s still something that they can still learn,” says Broughton. “There’s a bit of extra knowledge that you gain that you don’t get in the same way as being a customer.” ●

TASTE DETOURS

TO THE CORE

Tour seven different businesses in downtown Guelph. To The Core is offered Fridays and Saturdays from 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. \$60

LITTLE BITES

Tour four different businesses in downtown Guelph. Little Bites is offered on Thursdays from 4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. \$40

Custom and private tours are available.

For tickets and more information, visit tastedetours.ca.

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The tours are always a work in progress and she tries to learn something new every time, she says. She likes to consult with her husband, Kerry Mullen, a high school history teacher at GCVI, the morning or night before a tour. “I end up trying to talk



OPPOSITE TOP: A club sandwich and salad from Atmosphere Café, on Carden Street.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM: Yvonne Weiss, left, pours juice for the tour, run by Lynn Broughton, right, at ReFresh Juice, on Quebec Street.

RIGHT: Doubles, from Guelph Caribbean Cuisine, is a dish of curried chickpeas between two pieces of fried flatbread.

