

South + East

County



Desserts on display at the County Fair from the El Cajon Gem and Mineral Society's collection.

CHARLIE NEUMAN U-T

These sweet treats at fair rock

They look delicious, but don't try eating the desserts on display from El Cajon Gem and Mineral Society

BY KAREN PEARLMAN

EAST COUNTY

Decadent desserts with no calories at the San Diego County Fair? Chocolate mousse, raspberries and cream, mint chocolate chip ice cream, chocolate pie, lime gelatin and dinner mints.

There's a catch: These sweets cannot be eaten — unless you want to break some teeth.

The goodies are made of rocks, minerals and gemstones. Some have been cut and crafted, others appear just as they were found by "rockhounds."

The chocolate mousse is actually petrified wood, the raspberries and cream hematite and calcite, the ice cream rhyolite, the pie jasper, the gelatin calcite and the mints agate.

All are on display through Monday in the El Cajon Gem and Mineral Society's "Ye Olde Sweet Shoppe" inside the rock and gem area.

The group earned an "Educational Merit" award for its sweet display.

"People are drawn to them in a way because it's a joke; it's an illusion that you're expecting there to be food, but there isn't food," said El Cajon Gem and Mineral Society member Paul Clifford. "You don't necessarily have to love rocks to appreciate the humor."

Dorothy Relaford, 89, of Casa de Oro, along with one of her sons and a grandson are in charge of the fair

display. Relaford has been a member of the El Cajon club since 1978.

She and her family members are also in charge of the group's "Rock Feast" of foods. That collection, which was at last year's fair, is on permanent display at Heritage of the Americas Museum at Cuyamaca College.

The feast includes individual plates with items like turkey breast (river rock); filet mignon and beef roast (both jasper); a fish fillet (quartz); ribeye steak and pork roast (both petrified wood); a baked potato (field rock) with but-

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ter (orange calcite); and peas and pearl onions (aventurine and agate).

There are also biscuits, yams and French bread (all sandstone); corn (amber chips); rice (freshwater pearls); carrots (stalagmite); cauliflower (howlite); and cranberries (garnet).

Relaford and her husband, Bruce, who passed away eight years ago, were big into "rock hounding," as she describes their hobby of hunting for and collecting rocks and minerals throughout the West, and beyond

After her husband retired from the banking business in the early 1980s, the two would load up their RV and head to the desert or out to Arizona in search of natural treasures. They even drove to Montreal one year to look for stones.

Relaford said the two started the Rock Feast



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Catherine Richter and her son, Joel, 9, of Escondido, take in the "Ye Olde Sweet Shoppe" display of rock desserts by the El Cajon Gem & Mineral Society at the San Diego County Fair last Thursday.

more than 25 years ago after seeing a display of "rock food" at a gem and mineral show while visiting family in Texas. (That display is online at rockfoodtable.com)

"We were hosting a state show for our club in 1989, so when we came back from

Texas, we challenged our club to look at their rocks and see what kind of food they thought they were," she recalled.

When the group gathered a large enough collection, one of the members suggested a formal dinner

table with plates and settings, and a tablecloth covering.

She said other gem and mineral clubs and even sellers of rocks have contributed to the El Cajon group's collection of "food" over the years.

She said one of her favorite items is the chocolate mousse made of petrified wood, mostly because of a story surrounding it.

"Years ago, our president of the gem club at the time had a birthday," Relaford recalls. "He was going to contribute the mousse to our collection, but first he put it out on his table at his birthday party. His grandson who was in college at the time was at the party."

"His grandson said he had to leave early and was going to take some dessert with him. So he picked up a knife and was going to cut a piece! Everybody at the party burst out laughing."

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