

Get the flavor of Chicago neighborhoods

Chicago Food Planet offers walking tours guaranteed to satisfy

BY KATHERINE RODEGHIER
Special to the Daily Herald

Chicago is a city of neighborhoods, a melting pot of flavors, and nowhere is this more apparent than in its food emporiums. Take a culinary walking tour and you'll not only taste some of the Windy City's favorite foods and notable ethnic dishes, but you'll also learn a little bit about your surroundings.

Chicago Food Planet's three-hour tours (cue the "Gilligan's Island" theme song), combine tastings in five to seven food establishments with an anecdote-spiced commentary about the history and architecture of each neighborhood.

Choose from three locales: Chinatown, Near North Side and Bucktown/Wicker Park. Each tour begins late morning and follows a pattern of progressive eating: Stop for a tasting, then walk and listen to your guide's spiel, sample the food at stop two and walk some more. By the end of your tour, you won't be hungry for lunch.

All the food shops on the tours are small, family-run operations and none have paid to be included. They are chosen by Chicago Food Planet for their word-of-mouth reputation as being unusual, authentic and — most of all — tasty.



An 1877 Wicker Park mansion was an American Legion hall at one time and still has a 1902 cannon on its side lawn.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF KATHERINE RODEGHIER

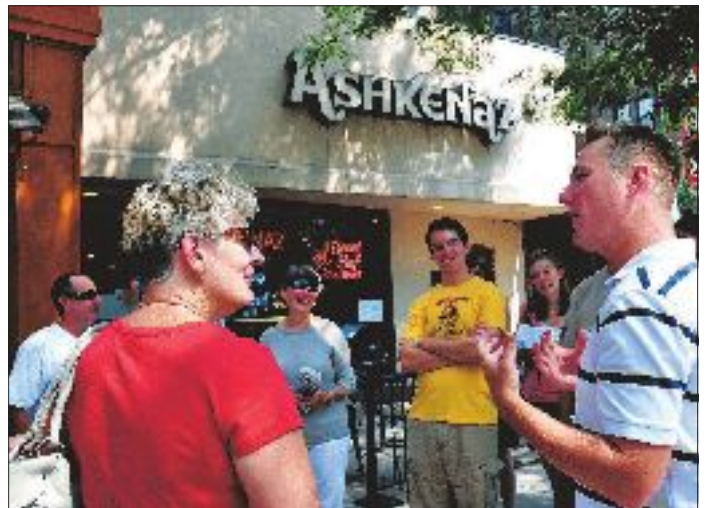
William and Mary Martin taste an iced chocolate with homemade marshmallow at HotChocolate restaurant and dessert bar.

Sample hot dogs and HotChocolate

The near northwest side neighborhoods of Bucktown and Wicker Park were settled mainly by immigrants from Poland and Germany. Workers in the local factories lived in modest Bucktown homes; owners of the factories resided in Wicker Park mansions. Both neighborhoods deteriorated dramatically by the 1960s and crime made the area unsafe. The turnaround began in the 1980s, and by the 1990s gentrification was in full swing as artists and young people moved in and rehabbed homes. Storefronts blossomed into upscale shops, art studios and restaurants.

Through it all, George's Hot Dogs continued to churn out authentic Chicago-style hot dogs. As you bite into one, your guide may tell you the hot dog was a hit at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition and how the seven toppings (no ketchup!) came to be.

Down the street you'll visit one of the new rising stars of the neighborhood restaurant scene, HotChocolate, run by James Beard award-winner Mindy



Tour guide Chris White gets a group ready for the Near North tour at Ashkenaz Deli, the first stop along the route.

Segal. Depending on the weather, you may taste her homemade marshmallows served with hot chocolate or an iced chocolate drink.

Next comes the Goddess and Grocer

deli, named for the nickname given to the owner by the rock bands she once catered on road trips.

And what food tour would be complete without pizza? At Piece, though,



The former Playboy mansion is featured on the Near North tour.

it's not Chicago pizza, but thin-crust, New Haven-style served with a tiny glass of one of the brewpub's beers.

As you walk into the residential area of Wicker Park, listen to your guide talk about the architecture of some of the

lovely old homes. One of them dating from 1877 once contained a speakeasy in the basement and later became

If you go

Depending on the neighborhood, tours are offered in March or April through November and cost \$42 to \$60 for adults, \$15 to \$35 for kids. For reservations and tour details, visit Chicagofoodplanet.com or call (800) 979-3370. Note any dietary restrictions when booking. Tours are held rain or shine and are nonrefundable. Bring your walking shoes.

an American Legion Hall. Look for the cannon in the side yard.

How about a taste of the Middle East with a falafel sandwich at Sultan's Market, then dessert at iCream? The owner turned a project for her degree at the University of Chicago into a business plan that calls for using liquid nitrogen to quick-freeze ice cream, sorbet and yogurt creations.

Walk the Gold Coast, Old Town, Lincoln Park

Take the Near North tour and you'll start off at Ashkenaz, a Jewish deli, for a Reuben sandwich, and then learn all about buying and steeping tea at Tea Gschwendner, the North American flagship of the German tea chain. Both

Continued on Page 8

Come Enjoy All the Great Things Happening This Fall at

FINE DINING & CASUAL RESTAURANTS. HEALTH, FITNESS & BEAUTY. FINANCIAL SERVICES.

Visit for the finest dining, shopping and services all conveniently located in one place. It's the best! With parking and a covered walkway to the shops and more than 50 Freedom Commons. Your Gateway to Great Things!

Check our website for our specials
www.FreedomCommons.com

The list of restaurants, retailers and services continues to grow at Freedom Commons. **Coming Soon:**

Located in Naperville on Freedom Dr. between I-88 and Diehl Rd.

Walking tours give you a taste of the city



Tour guide Carrie Drapac readies samples of ice cream for food tour participants at iCream where frozen desserts are custom made using liquid nitrogen.

Continued from Page 7

are located in the Gold Coast, named for the wealthy residents who lived there and still do.

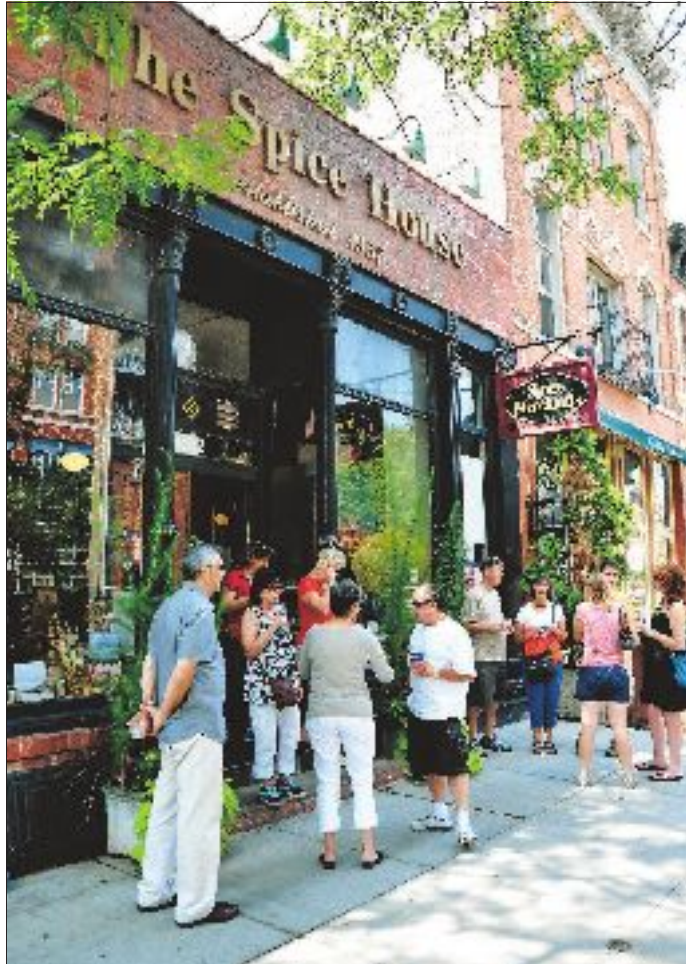
Your guide will no doubt point out Hugh Hefner's Playboy Mansion, converted to condos after he took his bunnies to the West Coast.

As you stroll into the next neighborhood, listen to the guide tell stories about the history of Old Town with its beatniks, and later the hippies who protested at the 1968 Democratic Convention.

Food Network spice experts Tom and Patty Erd opened The Spice House in Lincoln Park in the heart of Old Town. You'll get a little lecture on spices around the world before you're invited to sniff and taste a few freshly ground on the premises.

Think tasting spices is a bit odd? How about sipping oil and vinegar? Extra virgin olive oils from around the world and aged balsamic vinegars are stored in steel vats at Old Town Oil. Mix 'em up in a tiny paper cup, experimenting with the blend of flavors — say a tangerine balsamic with a blood orange oil.

OK, so sweets are more your thing. Get ready to feed your sweet tooth at the Fudge Pot, which turns Chicago's Bloomer's chocolate into fanciful creations, and Delightful Pastries, where kolackis are made according to a recipe from the owner's native Poland. You can taste a potato and cheese pierogi here, too.



The Near North food tour group wraps up a tasting at The Spice House.

Wrap up the Near North Side tour in Lincoln Park with a slice of deep-dish at Lou Malnati's Pizza and a walk through Oz Park with its Tin Man statue, a tribute to "The Wonderful Wizard of Oz" author L. Frank Baum, who lived in the neighborhood.

Eating around Chinatown

Chicago Food Planet's Chinatown tour is the most expensive of its three tours because three of the five tastings are sit-down meals with full portions of dishes such as Peking duck at Lao Beijing and dim sum at Triple Crown.

You'll also taste Sichuan cuisine at Lao Sze Chuan, traditional Chinese baked goods at Saint Anna Bakers and authentic loose-leaf tea at Tea Ren Tea and Ginseng Co.

Along the way your guide will fill you in on Chinese folklore and local customs while visiting Chinatown's religious and historic landmarks.

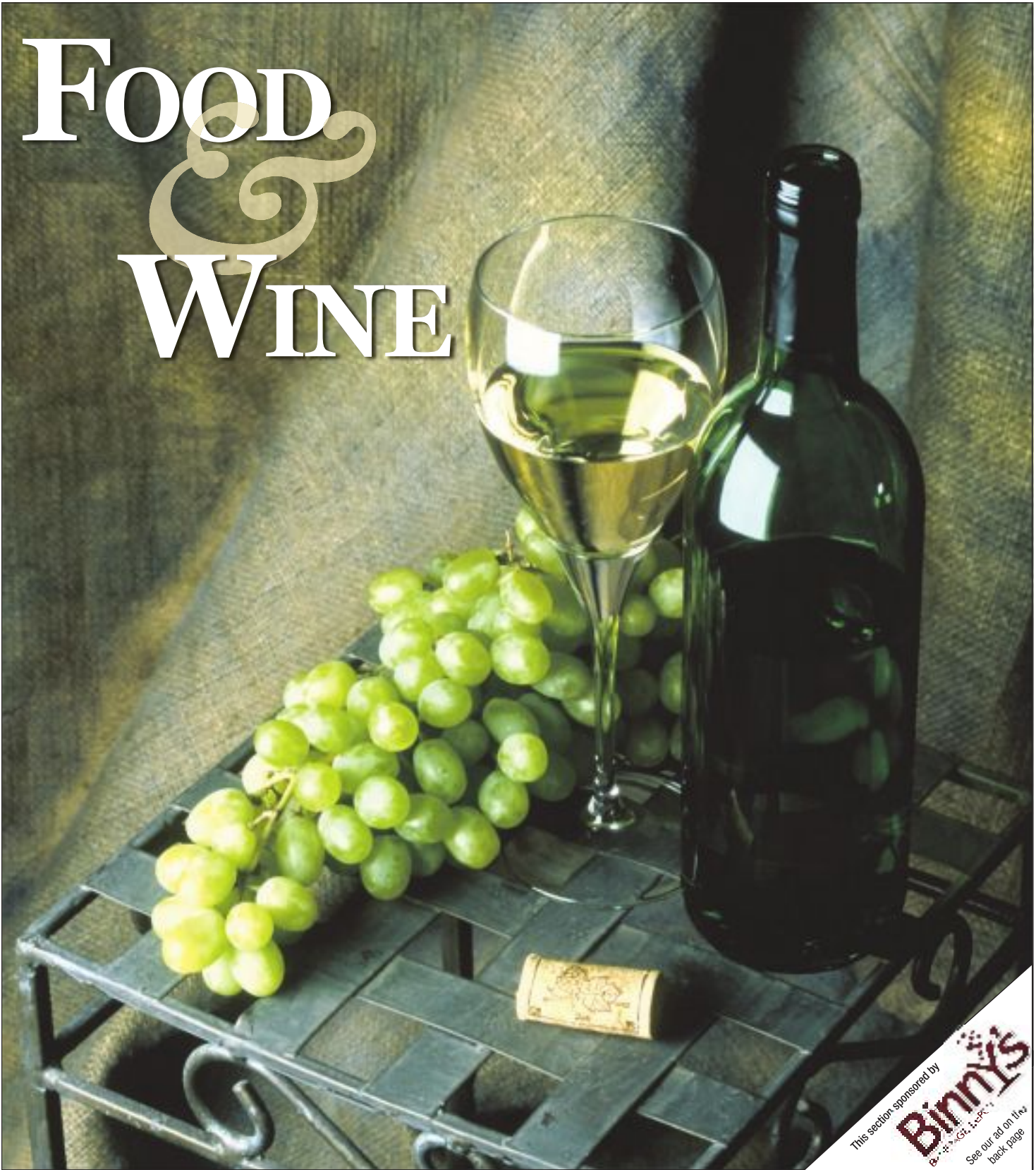


Delightful Pastries is the sixth stop on the Near North food tour. Below, tea consultant Ty Maxon prepares tea for tour members at Tea Gschwendner.



An Old Town Oil employee tends to containers of flavored balsamic vinegar for tasting.

FOOD & WINE



This section sponsored by

Binny's
Beverages & Spirits

See our ad on the
back page