

Author doing her part to put cheese on all plates

By Kathryn Reed

TRUCKEE – Cheese is more than a food to Laura Werlin – it's a passion, almost an obsession. After all, her sixth book on the subject will be released in early December.

Lake Tahoe News caught up with the energetic author of all things cheese earlier this month before she gave a seminar called Belgian Brews and Artisan Cheese Pairing as part of the annual Lake Tahoe Autumn Food and Wine Festival at Northstar.



Laura Werlin

"I've loved cheese since I've had teeth," Werlin says. Her first memory of cheese is of single slices of American cheese on Wonder bread that was then grilled.

While her taste buds have evolved, her love of grilled cheese has not faded. In fact, in 2004 she published "Great Grilled Cheese" and in 2011 she came out with "Grilled Cheese, Please!"

"The All American Cheese and Wine Book" earned her a James Beard award.

She transitioned from being in the television news business to being a food writer to now being an author of cheese. American cheese is her focus.

Werlin's initial goal with her books was to answer all the questions she had about cheese because she figured other people had those same questions.

What she discovered is many people find cheese to be intimidating. That's why people stick with the same Brie or cheddar they've always had.

The industry is growing, with cheese now made in nearly every state.

"Unlike wine, you don't need the perfect climate," Werlin said. "It's being made in remote and more urban places. Not every cheesemaker has animals. They buy the milk."

With more people paying attention to where their food comes from, it's now possible to buy local cheeses no matter what corner of the continent one calls home.

For her tasting at Northstar she brought a cheese from Aspen, another was from Holland.

Werlin likes that more and more farmers markets have cheese purveyors who allow shoppers to sample the goods. She says this breaks down barriers – which means cheese becomes less intimidating.

She embraces the European tradition of serving cheese after a meal instead of the American ritual of cheese as an appetizer.

Werlin said the problem with starting with cheese is "it's filling and will impact your appetite."

And cheese does not have to be expensive to be part of one's repertoire. In Werlin's book about macaroni and cheese she has two recipes that call for Velveeta.

"What matters to me is that cheese is made well and it tastes good," Werlin said.

