



Celebrating What Unites Us: Somalia Edition



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There are few things in life more conducive to cultivating community and fostering a sense of peace and wholesomeness than sharing a meal together. The concept of Celebrating What Unites Us is to do exactly that while also expanding horizons and drawing attention to key issues such as connecting residents to food access. The monthly event provides education through cooking demos and gives attendees a chance to walk the labyrinth at the Armenian Heritage Park.

This month's theme was Somalia and the special speaker was Faisa Sharif from the Mayor's Office Of Neighborhood Services. Faisa is the contact for the South End, Bay Village, and acts as a liason for the Somali community as well. She shared her story with the group who also asked questions of their own ranging from what some of her favorite Somali recipes are, what languages are spoken in that region of the world, and how has the welcome been for her.

Mentioning the North End community, Sharif credited the community for introducing her to the Feasts and inspiring her with the community's pride in their ancestral heritage. Sharif also observed that Boston, despite being a big city, is still able to recognize the individual contributions each immigrant community has made. She added that we are incredibly privileged to have such a world-class education system.

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After the talk, some walked the labyrinth at the Park while others chose to head to The Kitchen for a lunch made up of native Somali dishes. At the Kitchen, attendees were met by Chef Cleo Belle and her assistants. Chef Cleo welcomed everyone to the space after which Yahya Noor and his sister, Rukiya, from Tawakal Cafe in East Boston, delivered a demonstration on how to make chapati and sambusa (the Somali version of samosa).

Attendees asked questions like what sort of oil is used in Somali cooking (primarily olive oil and sesame oil), what other cultural influences are at play (Yahya mentioned that with Somalia once being a colony of Italy, Italian culinary styles are common along with Indian and others), and why bananas are also such a staple at the table (the jury's still out on that one although bananas do grow abundantly in that region).

Andrea Burns from Age Friendly Boston, Amy Walsh from Dementia Friendly Boston, and Elizabeth Miller from the Mayor's Office Of Food Access delivered brief informational remarks and also provided resources in the form of handouts, maps and brochures.

The next Celebrating What Unites Us will take place on Wednesday September 18th from 10:30AM to 1PM. More information can be found [here](#).