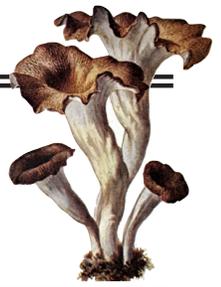

Mycena News



The Mycological Society of San Francisco • Dec. 2014, vol. 66:04

MYCO-MENDO-MONDO: Discovering Your Unsung Mushroom Heroes

Ken Litchfield and India Mandelkern

After several years of drought, this season's thirteen inch rains made the MSSF's annual pilgrimage to the Mendocino Woodlands a resounding success. 130 participants collected over 300 different species in all. Yet among the more conventional edibles — golden chanterelles, candy-caps, porcini, yellow feet, and the early arrivals of elegant black trumpets — the diversity was far less impressive. At least, that's what the uninitiated might think.

Over the past few years, MycoMendoMondo has become an important nocturnal culinary ritual among MSSF campers. While we all agree that there is much to be learned about mushrooms from our trusty field guides, we suspect that many of the edible species found in the Mendocino woodlands have been unfairly sidelined in the kitchen. Not only is it unreasonable to expect today's chefs to know how to prepare every possible specimen that comes their ways, but also, as the recipe genre is so naturally fraught with plagiarism and unsubstantiated borrowings, we shouldn't be surprised if some of these mushrooms' most vociferous critics have never actually tried them at all.

MycoMendoMondo aims to enhance the observational experiences of Mendo foragers by giving them the opportunity to deploy the scientific method, chef style, in the professional, stainless steel kitchen laboratory of the Mendo Woodlands lodge. By selecting a few choice specimens, reducing culinary manipulation to its most basic elemental forms (butter and salt) intrepid tasters have attempted to restore some of Mendocino's unfairly maligned edibles to their rightful culinary places.

Take *Gomphus floccosus*, for example, which for years has suffered from the unappetizing reptilian moniker, the "scaly chanterelle." Even "floccosus" sounds tastier. David Arora described it as having an "unpleasant sour taste," thus deterring some of the most adventurous of chefs. Yet after a simple sauté in butter and salt, most of the tasters found it quite delicious, generally preferring this simple preparation to a second version with browned onions. Perhaps it's about time to rebrand this mushroom: the "scarlet lace chanterelle."

Even the notorious toadstool of folklore — *Amanita muscaria* — received a second look. "Most folks immediately assume this mushroom is poisonous," MycoMendoMondo organizer Ken Litchfield explained. "But once it is parboiled, the so-called 'Santa mushroom' is actually a fine edible." Even historical accounts do not provide any clear evidence that this mushroom truly deserved its bad reputation. Some versions of it can cause psychoactive or other 'toxic' effects, but these effects can be extracted into the parboiling water. The mushroom then can be eaten by those interested in partaking of the edible bounty of the forest and the water can be drunk by those with more esoteric tastes. It is quite tasty with a good texture.

Another unexpected crowd-pleaser was *Clavariadelphus truncatus*, the "candy club" mushroom so prolific in the woods this year. Nibbled raw on the identification table, its flesh tastes a little like cotton candy. Cooked, it is sweet like the stevia sweetleaf herb, and served well sautéed with bananas and pecans as the natives of Colorado do. Probably the most popular mushroom was the *Agaricus smithii*, the "Not-the-prince" that were in extraordinary abundance this year. Tight and with the veil unbroken, it exuded anise and almond aromas. Quite savory with everyone when sautéed in butter and salt.

Of course, there were plenty of mushrooms that reminded the tasting team of the wide gulf between the delicious and the merely edible. Many declared no amount of butter, salt, shallots or cream could redeem the local hawk's wing. "Metallic parsley," one taster declared, while others contended that perhaps longer cooking could salvage it. *Stropharia ambigua* was also pretty much a no go for most folks, though a couple did like it. It usually takes on the flavor of its substrate so rather than humusy, it might be better if grown on straw, coffee grounds, or cocoa hulls.

In this year's MycoMendoMondo, we managed to try about a dozen different species in all. Hope to see you late night in the lodge kitchen for more experiments next year.



Late night kitchen wizardry

PRESIDENT'S POST

Hello MSSF Members,

November was a successful start to another highly anticipated mushroom season. Given the great diversity out in the Jackson State Forest at this year's Mendocino Camp, there is certainly hope that our Bay Area woods will see similar results after a few more rains. In addition to the forays, Dennis Desjardin and Langdon Cook gave two informative and entertaining talks on California mushrooms and the pickers that spend their livelihoods going out and finding them. I want to thank the staff and volunteers for making this year's camp possible. Special thanks goes to Mendocino Camp Director Curt Haney for making this another wonderful and highly regarded event. "Forays, Food, and Fun" will be sure to describe Mendocino Camp as long as Curt is at the helm.

In other food news, I attended my first ever MSSF Culinary Group dinner this past November, and Kristin Jensen, Ellen Burkhart, and Leslie deLone did an excellent job captaining and executing a British themed pub dinner. The Culinary Group has been central to the MSSF for many years and Paul Lufkin and Dave and Peggy Manuel are doing a great job as the committee chairs for this year's group. If you haven't had the chance to go to a dinner, please look into becoming a member and mark the 1st Monday of the month as a date to remember.

The annual MSSF holiday dinner will take place on Monday, December 15. Please go to www.mssf.org to register for a spot, as honorary member Al Carvajal is bringing in a talented local chef, who will be curating a delicious menu. Bring a friend, some dishware and a little holiday cheer as we share in some end of the year revelry.

The annual MSSF Fungus Fair is also upon us; it is scheduled for December 6th and 7th at the San Francisco County Fair Building, also known as the Hall of Flowers, in Golden Gate Park. This year, we are adding an extra seminar day on Saturday along with the main event display tables on Sunday. Stephanie Wright and others have been doing a great job setting up this year's lineup, so please help out by either volunteering at the Fair or spreading the word via friends, fliers, and social media. This is one of the MSSF's biggest fundraisers, so all your help is needed and very appreciated. To register as a volunteer, go to www.mssf.org/fungus-fairs

There will be much more in store after the Fungus Fair and holidays, so be sure to keep up to date with the MSSF's activities by coming to general meetings, following our Yahoo group, or joining in on a foray. The rain will be sure to bring multitudes of mushroom possibilities.

Thanks again to all of you who continuously contribute to make the MSSF a great organization. I look forward to seeing many of you at the Fungus Fair, the holiday dinner, and many other MSSF events.

-David Gardella

CULINARY CORNER

Patricia George

Probably the busiest month for Northern California mushroom lovers is December. Yes, the fabulous fungi we love to study and we love to cook seem to prefer this month to charm and sustain us in great numbers and variety. Nor is the culinary side of mycology ignored. Amongst the variety of mushrooms usually fruiting in December are chanterelles and boletes. Many other species fruit in the winter: shaggy manes, *Agaricus*, *Sparassis*, and matsutake. Recently, David Arora shared information on a preparation he deemed especially delicious that had been made for him by his friend, Wendy So, using fresh porcini tubes, those rather unattractive parts rejected by most as slimy and unpleasant. She puts slices, just a few pieces at a time, on a little plate, each slice of tube layer with a tiny bit of salt and a little butter on top. They are then steamed for 5 minutes from the time the water boils. I prepared this for myself and must find more porcini so I can have it again and again.

With the advent of chanterelles, here's yet another pasta recipe with a creamy chanterelle sauce, but with a luxury addition which makes it especially appropriate for a holiday dinner.

Pasta with Creamy Chanterelle Sauce

- 3 tbsp. unsalted butter
- ½ lb. chanterelles, preferably small, somewhat hard ones, halved, or larger ones, cut into bite sized pieces.
- 2 finely chopped shallots
- ½ cup Cinzano dry vermouth
- 1 cup heavy cream
- chopped parsley to taste
- salt and pepper to taste
- ¼ cup truffle butter, or to taste
- 8 oz. fresh or dry pappardelle or fettuccine

Cook pasta until just under al dente. Sauté shallots in butter until transparent. Add chanterelles and cook until they soften and brown a little. Add vermouth and cook until most of it has evaporated. Add cream. Cook until thickened, about 2 minutes. Remove from the fire. Season with salt and pepper. Add truffle butter and sprinkle with chopped parsley. Add the cooked pasta and serve in your nicest shallow, wide bowls. (Note: Always put truffle butter in at the last.

Don't cook it.)

The Culinary Group got a taste of British pub grub at our last dinner. When I lived in England, I thought it (along with Indian food) was the best choice for informal dinners out. Our dinner chefs outdid themselves and greatly surpassed what I ate in England (and in Scotland and Ireland

Continued on page three

Culinary Corner continued

for that matter.) The main offerings were beef cottage pie, a lamb shepherd's pie, and a vegetarian pie, all of which were made with luxurious mixtures of mushrooms. We also enjoyed roasted vegetables, peas with matsutake, and a lovely green salad. To top off this very much appreciated repast, we had coffee and trifle, that grand English specialty which was delicious but the origin of an unfortunate number of awful puns. Thanks to all of you, cooks!

Instead of a Culinary Group dinner in December, we will have our annual Holiday Dinner, open to all MSSF members, to take place on December 15. See the MSSF calendar (as well as below) for details. Hope to see you there, and in woods doing what I like to do best: looking for fungi.



To Celebrate the Holiday Season, the
Mycological Society of San Francisco

Invites you to the
Annual Holiday Dinner

MENU

Appetizer Buffet (provided by MSSF volunteers)
Holiday Eggnog

Garden Salad with Raspberry Dressing
Cream of Chanterelle Soup
Whole Wheat Rolls and Herbed Butter

then

Filet of Beef with Morel Sauce
Or Wild Mushroom Vegetarian Strudel (By Advance Request)
Potatoes au Gratin with Gruyere and Black Trumpets
Creamed Spinach

then

Bread Pudding with Candy Cap-Rum Sauce
Coffee and Tea

Chef: Michael Giacomini
Cost: \$40/MSSF member; \$45/non-members
Location: Hall of Flowers, 9th Avenue and Lincoln, San Francisco
Time: Monday, December 15. Appetizers at 7:00 pm., dinner at 8:00 pm.

Reservations are required. Please sign on at www.mssf.org, where you can select to pay by Paypal or at the door. You can also mail a check, payable to MSSF, together with the names of the attendees to:

MSSF Holiday dinner c/o Alvaro Carvajal
800 Castro Street
San Francisco, CA 94114-2809

You must bring your own dinner beverage and tableware. (Dishes, eating utensils, glassware, napkins, etc. are not provided.)

Mycena News

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Contributors:

David Gardella
Patricia George
Curt Haney
Ken Litchfield
India Mandelkern
Eric Multhaup

Editing and Layout:

India Mandelkern

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To subscribe, renew, or make address changes, please contact Zach Mayes:
Membership@MSSF.org

Past issues of *Mycena News* can be read online at www.mssf.org

MSSF Officers 2014-2015

President: David Gardella
President@MSSF.org

Vice-President: Brennan Wenck
VicePresident@MSSF.org

Secretary: Eric Multhaup
Secretary@MSSF.org

Treasurer: Henry Shaw
Treasurer@MSSF.org

MYCOLOGY, MEDICINE, AND *EATING WILDLY*: A CONVERSATION WITH AVA CHIN

By India Mandelkern

Before the advent of genetics and modern chemistry, diseases were cured according to a system that physicians called the Doctrine of Signatures, or just “DOS.” Trees, shrubs, seeds, and mushrooms were much more than what met the eye. Rather, their colors and shapes made up systems of signs, hinting at the divine logic that underpinned the nature of all things.

Walnuts fuelled intelligence, thanks to their crinkly, cranial shape. The bright red sap of herbacious bloodroot was known to work upon the blood. Signatures connected human bodies to an underlying cosmological blueprint, helping them navigate the mysteries of the universe. *For if every Herbe shew that there is a God, as verily it doth*, one 17th century physician wrote, *what Lectures of Divinity might we receive from them, if we would but attend diligently to the inward understanding of them?*

As a stand-alone taxonomic system, the Doctrine of Signatures might be long dead and buried. But this doesn't mean that its principles have vanished from our 21st century consciousness. In her new book, *Eating Wildly: Foraging for Life, Love, and the Perfect Meal* (Simon and Schuster, 2014) Ava Chin — better known as the “Urban Forager” of the *New York Times* — wanders the sidewalks, parking lots, and forgotten alleyways of New York City, where the sights, smells, and tastes of local flora recall precious childhood memories, provide an antidote to a broken heart, and instill her with courage to practice forgiveness.

“In many ways, I was born to be a forager,” Chin told me. Having inherited both her grandfather's palate and his faith in traditional Chinese medicine — or, better put, that food *is* medicine — Chin was exposed to unfamiliar edibles of all kinds in Flushing's Asian grocery stores. It wasn't until years later, however, that she got her hands on a copy of Euell Gibbons' 60's classic *Stalking the Wild Asparagus*, and headed into the distant corners of the big city on her own.

Throughout all five boroughs, Chin finds everything from mulberries to lambsquarters to garlic mustard, baking them into delectable treats that bring her personal and professional fulfillment. Yet mushrooms represent something special in her book. Not only do they strike us with their mysterious fruitings — for centuries, men have marveled at the way that they seemed to “grow from nothing” — but their intrigue is heightened by the false friends and look-alikes that can inflict uncomfortable, even lethal, consequences. “I think the mushroom's uniqueness has something to do with its temporality,” Chin says. “It's easy to find a grove of stinging nettles, and you bet it will then stay where it is. But mushroom fruitings are so ephemeral. One day you look down and find yourself in the middle of a fairy ring. A week later and they're all gone.”

Much like the exotic fungi that they study, mycological societies remain mysterious to today's food writers. Yet they play an important role in Chin's research and writing. She was “humbled” by the generosity of these amateur mycophiles, many of whom gladly opened their homes to assist her with spore prints and identifications. (She still attends the weekly mushroom identifications hosted by the New York Mycological Society.) With the public's growing interest in wild food, they will surely come into the public eye. During the eight years that Chin has been involved with the New York Mycological Society, she has seen membership virtually explode.

This is unquestionably a good thing, but it hasn't been without a backlash. In New York City, urban forays cross into a legal gray zone. Unlike the ring of morel pickers arrested in the Rim Fire burn zone earlier this spring, no one in New York City is foraging for commercial purposes. Within city limits, however, authorities worry about the consequences of urban foraging's newfound popularity. “There's an old fashioned notion that a park is basically an outdoor museum,” she says. “That visitors should be able to look but not touch.” Still, it hasn't prevented park rangers from ignoring their own rules, sometimes even advising visitors where to find the best spots.

There are plenty of reasons why foraging has become so popular over the past few years. Climate change, globalization, and the hyper-industrialization of the food system are all perfectly reasonable explanations. Yet by describing foraging as a “moving meditation,” Chin seems to imply that its appeal might be deeper. In addition to providing food and medicine, foraging is a prehistoric practice, substantially predating the invention of agriculture and cooking. So deeply connected to how we came to be the way we are, it is little wonder that our most powerful emotions — love, belonging, forgiveness — are so deeply invested in it.



Ava Chin, posing with the fruits of an urban expedition. Photo: Owen Brunette

THE NEWLY FOUND ART OF MUSHROOM ARRANGING

By Eric Multhaupt

So, you're interested in mushrooms, and have explored some of their myriad facets. Maybe you've grown them, picked them, eaten them, photographed them, dyed your clothes with them, used them as furniture, cured the common cold with them. There is always more. Have you considered a venture into the aesthetics of mushroom arranging?

There are important precedents, of course. *Ikebana*, the art of Japanese flower arranging, was developed by Buddhist priests in the 6th century AD. The origins of stone arrangements are even more mysterious. Mushroom arranging, by contrast is such a newly found art that you can Google it until your electronics grow weary and all you will find are a few bad puns (Fungus Shway: the Japanese Art of Mushroom Arranging) and the ruminations of a Virginia-based sheep farmer: "Who knows, maybe mushroom arranging is the next hip thing?"

Don't let the lack of an established tradition keep you from getting started. Mushroom arranging equipment and techniques are simple and inexpensive. Go to a florist and buy some Oasis blocks, brick-shaped objects made of "floral foam": highly water absorbent and used widely in flower arrangements. Then get something waterproof to hold the saturated Oasis blocks. My go-to container is a disposable aluminum baking pan from the grocery store. They come in many sizes (from single-serving meat-loaf to Thanksgiving turkey) so you can customize your tableau. Generally, you will need to trim the Oasis blocks to fit snugly in the container using a butcher knife. They cut easily and neatly. Finally, you need a mixture of wooden toothpicks and barbecue skewers of a couple of different sizes to hold the mushrooms upright.

Now comes the fun part. Head out into the woods and start picking. My personal preference is to eschew a pre-existing picking list in favor of mentally developing your arrangement based on what's available. There is no one way, or even a thousand ways, to do this, but here are a couple of ideas for themes you might consider:

Color: An arrangement can be very striking if composed of, say, all red and white mushrooms used to create a 'holiday' display (think *Amanita muscaria*, *Russula rosacea*, and *Sarcoscypha coccinea*, the scarlet cup fungus). You could also introduce a riot of color with hygrocybes and chanterelles.

Genus: The arrangement in the photo is all amanitas both muscaria and gemmata (hence the warning sign in the foreground). This theme is particularly useful if you have some educational goal involved, such as showing kids how mushrooms are related.

Habitat: Arrangements based on mycorrhizal affinity with a particular tree can also have pedagogical import.

Once you return home with your basketful, it's time to start arranging. Generally, it works well to have a variety of sizes so that you can put larger ones at the base and build structures with the smaller ones. My experience is that it doesn't add that much to hollow out a hole in the Oasis block so that the bottom of the mushroom stipe can fit in and draw moisture. Doing that obscures the volva if there is one, and since there is no way to provide moisture for the mushrooms placed on top of other mushrooms, it doesn't extend the shelf life of the entire arrangement, which is usually about 3-4 days. Instead, use the skewers and toothpicks to hold the base mushrooms upright, and to secure the superstructure of mushrooms attached to them. Try cutting the stipe off a larger mushroom that has particularly attractive gills, and attach it gill-side-up to the Oasis block. Look for odd angles to attach the mushrooms to each other as a variation on the classic totem pole. You can build a fairly elaborate structure on a small base.

In my experience, these arrangements look far more appealing and interesting if there is flora intermixed with the mushrooms. The flora provides a background as well as a woody feel. Generally I use some taller cuttings as a backdrop to the arrangement and put smaller greens in the foreground. In the photo, there are ferns, always green and graceful, decorative grasses, cuttings from decorative plants in the *Artemisia* genus (the gray ones), and one calla lily. I have also been successful with large nasturtium leaves with stems large and strong enough to push into the Oasis block, sprigs of tree leaves with interesting or unusual tones, and even seasonal onion grass with a spray of white flowers at the top. My experience is that flowers generally contend with the mushroom for attention, so I avoid them. But then again, there are no rules when it comes to mushroom arranging. It's your aesthetic that counts. (Note: the flora does need the water provided by the Oasis blocks to hold on for three or four days.)

So, think of the Oasis block as your canvas, and the mushrooms as your three-dimensional paints. These arrangements always look engaging and appealing, so your success rate is likely to be high from the very beginning. If a few of us get into the spirit, we can start an online gallery.



An Amanita Arrangement

A CELEBRATION OF
WILD
MUSHROOMS
 THE 45TH ANNUAL FUNGUS FAIR

San Francisco County Fair Building
HALL OF FLOWERS
 Golden Gate Park 9th & Lincoln
Saturday & Sunday
DECEMBER 6 & 7, 2014
 10 am – 5 pm
 Join the festivities as Mushrooms
 take over the Hall of Flowers!

Saturday & Sunday: Children's activities, cooking
 demos, lectures, cultivation workshops & fabulous
 soups for sale.

Sunday Only: A display of more than 200
 species of wild mushrooms, microscopes,
 education tables, plus vendors
 selling mushroom art, craft items,
 books & fresh mushrooms.



Admission per day:
 \$10 Adults
 \$8 Seniors 65+/Students w/ID
 \$5 Children 6-12, under 6 free

Discount 2-day tickets:
 Not available at the door, must
 be purchased online at
 EventBright.com



The Fungus Fair is
 presented by the
 Mycological Society
 of San Francisco.
www.mssf.org



PATRICE BENSON MEMORIAL NAMA FORAY: OCTOBER 9-12, 2014

By Curt Haney

Over the past ten years, I have served the MSSF as a Counselor, Merchandising Chair, VP, and President, but I had never been to the annual NAMA foray. This year I decided to include it along with my annual October foraging trip to Oregon and Washington state. I left San Francisco on September 30 and traveled up the coast to Seattle. Just north of Eureka, chanterelles and porcini were starting to fruit, thanks to the three inches of rain they had received two weeks prior. But the entire coast of Oregon and part of the way into Washington was bone dry. I didn't find a single mushroom over several days.

On October 4, I arrived at the Seattle-Tacoma airport and picked up my wife for several days of foraging *Hericium*, lobsters, chanterelles, and porcini around Mount Rainier before joining the NAMA foray, located near Eatonville on the Western slope. This year's foray was hosted by the Puget Sound Mycological Society and dedicated to its past President, Patrice Benson.

Base camp was located at Camp Arnold, situated in a large forest clearing with a trout lake and beautiful views of Mount Rainier. For each of four days, 12 passenger vans shuttled about 300 attendees to various locations around Mt. Rainier. We collected about 500 different specimens in all. There was also ample time to attend lectures and workshops offered by all the big names in the fungi world: Tom Volk, Michael Beug, Jim Trappe, Steve Trudell, Noah Siegel, Paul Kroeger, Denis Benjamin, and Paul Stamets. With a 100% volunteer force, the Puget Sound Mycological Society had started organizing this foray two years in advance, and it certainly showed. I overheard many longtime members observe that it was the best foray they had ever attended.

I was surprised at how few MSSF members attended the NAMA foray this year, probably no more than half a dozen out of a membership of approximately 1200. I want to remind our members that the MSSF is a participating member of NAMA. Each year we pay dues in order to provide all our members the opportunity to join NAMA at a discounted rate and to be eligible to attend the annual NAMA foray. They are great ways to meet members of clubs from all over the country and to reconnect with old friends. Next year's foray will be in North Carolina. After the foray, I headed for the Olympic peninsula. Over 10 days, in old and new locations, I found abundant numbers of chanterelles and porcini before returning to Seattle at the PSMS mushroom festival. Last, I headed home back through Oregon, returning to San Francisco just in time for Halloween.



HOSPITALITY SHOUT-OUT TO PAUL LUFKIN

The Hospitality Committee sends out its thanks for the excellent efforts of guest chef Paul Lufkin for October appetizers. Paul made an array of mushroom and cheese tarts, with puff pastry, caramelized onions, a medley of mushrooms, and goat cheese. Much appreciated!

YOU TOO can be a guest chef at a hospitality function at some point of your choosing in the future! Just email one of your Hospitality co-chairs:

Eric: mullew@comcast.net

George: gwillis2@mac.com



Mycological Society of San Francisco
c/o The Randall Museum
199 Museum Way
San Francisco, CA 94114



"A World of Wonder at Your Feet"

Dec. 2014, vol. 66:04

MSSF Calendar 2014-2015

Saturday-Sunday, December 6-7, Fungus Fair
Hall of Flowers, County Fair Building
Golden Gate Pk., 9th & Lincoln, S.F.

Monday Dec. 15th, 7:00 pm - MSSF Annual Holiday Dinner
Hall of Flowers, Golden Gate Park, 9th Ave and Lincoln, S.F.
Contact Person: Al Carvajal - 415-317-1970

Monday, January 5, 7:00 p.m. - Culinary Group Dinner
Hall of Flowers, Golden Gate Pk., 9th & Lincoln, S.F.
Pre-registration required for attendance.

Tuesday, January 20, 7:00 p.m. - MSSF General Meeting
Randall Museum, 199 Museum Way, San Francisco.
7 p.m. - Mushroom identification and refreshments.
8 p.m. - Speaker: Dennis Desjardin

MSSF Volunteers Needed

Hospitality Chefs: In 2010, the Hospitality Committee made a concerted effort to upgrade the hospitality offerings that preceded the general meetings from a fairly bland regimen of Ritz crackers and apple juice to mushroom-based snacks and complementary wine. This program has succeeded since then through the efforts of the volunteer chefs who make the mushroom appetizers. A recent call for more guest chefs yielded volunteers for the meetings through March 2015, but we need additional volunteers for April and May. If you are willing to pitch in, e-mail George Willis: george_willis@sbcglobal.net or Eric Multhaup: mullew@comcast.net.

Check the MSSF online calendar at:
<http://www.mssf.org/calendar/index.php>
for full details, latest updates
and schedule changes.

Submit to *Mycena News*! The submission deadline
for the January 2014 issue is December 15th.
Send all articles, calendar items and other information
to: mycenanews@mssf.org