

2013 ProStart Competition

Over 120 high school students from 10 schools around Nevada competed in the 11th Annual Nevada ProStart[®] Invitational, presented by the Nevada Restaurant Association. The competition was held at Northwest Career and Technical Academy on February 5-6, 2013.

Top honors went to East Career & Technical Academy and Silverado High School, both of Las Vegas, in the team culinary and team management divisions, respectively. Both teams will go on to represent Nevada at the National ProStart Invitational to be held April 19-21 in Baltimore, Maryland.

In the team culinary category, teams of 3-4 students had 60 minutes to prepare 2 identical meals consisting of a starter, entrée, and dessert using only 2 butane burners as their heat source. East CTA's winning menu included a red beet napoleon with herbed goat cheese, hazelnuts, microgreens with an orange-thyme vinaigrette as the starter; an herb-marinated lamb with orzo, butternut squash, and red swiss chard for the entrée; and a deconstructed baklava with orange-honey mousse, salted caramel chip, and a pomegranate-raspberry sauce for dessert. The second-fourth place finishers in the team culinary category were Silverado High School; Northwest Career & Technical Academy "Team A Cut Above the Rest" of Las Vegas; and Southeast Career & Technical Academy "Team Espanol" of Las Vegas.

In the team management competition, teams had to prepare a written proposal, verbal presentation, and visual display board for a new restaurant concept. Silverado placed first with their original casual dining concept called Saucier. Second place in the management competition was awarded to Southwest Career & Technical Academy of Las Vegas; third place went to East CTA; and fourth place went to Academy of Arts, Careers, and Technology from Reno.

This year, two individual cake decorating contests were held. In the first cake category, students had 60 minutes to assemble and decorate a 2-layer cake with the theme "Valentine's Day." Students were only allowed to use buttercream frosting to pipe and decorate their cake. East CTA's Asia Heter was crowned the state champion with a beautiful rose-covered cake. Jaida Sproed of Southeast CTA took second place; Sofia Tarango of East CTA placed third; and Esteban Rodriguez of Silverado High and Katarina Bussman of Southwest CTA tied for fourth place.

In the second cake contest, students had 75 minutes to create a 3-tiered cake and were able to use any edible ingredients to decorate the cake; this year's theme for the tiered cakes division was "Carnivals." Morgan Wishengrad of Northwest CTA was named state champion; Alexis Monasterio of East CTA; Tiana Robinson of Northwest CTA placed third; and Juan Nunez of Green Valley High School placed fourth.

In the knife skills/edible centerpiece contest, individual competitors had to create an edible centerpiece using only fruits and vegetables. The students had 45 minutes to carve their items into intricate shapes to create a visually-pleasing arrangement. Aleah Thomas of Northwest CTA captured first place, followed by Esteban Rodriguez of Silverado High; Gregorio Portillo of Silverado High, and Christ Bracamontes of Northwest CTA finished fourth.

Twenty-seven judges from industry and postsecondary institutions evaluated the five contests and provided invaluable feedback to all the competitors. Among the illustrious panel of judges were Chefs Luciano Pellegrini of Valentino Las Vegas; Mark Purdy and Tammy Alana of Alize at the Top of the Palms; Anthony Vidal and William White of Hash House A Go Go; John Hurzel of Grandma Hattie's; Heath Cicerelli of Emeril's New Orleans Fish House; Mark Levasseur and Miguel Rosales of Le Cordon Bleu; Brian Elledge of Mandalay Bay Hotel & Casino; Paul Zdanis of Bellagio Las Vegas; Brian Kenny and Flora Aghababayan of Wynn Las Vegas; Scott Pajak of Lagasse's Stadium; Richard Gibson of Battista's Hole in the Wall; Raymond Bar of the Art Institute; Dale "Shag" Shigenaga, Claude Lambertz, and Jean Hertzman of UNLV as well as Michael Santos and Joe Micatrotto of Micatrotto Restaurant Group; Paymon Raouf of Paymon's Mediterranean Café; Elizabeth Muto from the Epicurean Charitable Foundation; Lorri Davidson of Southwest Gas Corporation; Sherry Holman of NV Energy; and Joe Lichardi of Sysco Las Vegas.

Special recognition was given to Chef Gary LaMorte as the Mentor of the Year. Chef LaMorte has served as the chef-mentor for the Silverado High School ProStart students since 2008. He is unflagging in his passion for the industry and his commitment to the students while managing his full time job as Corporate Sous Chef for the Mina Group, which entails traveling to various Mina Group restaurants around the country.

Teacher of the Year honors went to Joyel Reyna of Southeast CTA. Reyna was chosen due to her commitment to her students, her dedication to assisting fellow teachers, and her tireless support and promotion of the ProStart program. She will receive an all-expenses paid trip to Chicago in May where she will be honored at a special Educators of Excellence luncheon and be given a complimentary pass to the National Restaurant Association Show.

The ProStart Student of the Year award honors a special ProStart senior for demonstrating leadership skills as well as academic and culinary excellence. Brittany Chopp was named the 2013 Student of the Year; she will receive a \$1000 scholarship from the NvRAEF. Chopp's many achievements include carrying a 3.7 GPA while working several part-time jobs, holding leadership positions in several clubs, and being actively involved in ProStart, DECA, Skills USA as well as several community or charitable organizations. Chopp has already been accepted to Johnson & Wales University, Denver, where she will study culinary management in the fall. The two other finalists were Rick Bools of Silverado High and Danielle Kachoian of Northwest Career & Technical Academy.

In total, competition winners were awarded over \$546,000 in scholarships from the International Culinary Schools at Art Institute, Johnson & Wales University, Le Cordon Bleu College of Culinary Arts Las Vegas, Louisiana Culinary Institute, and New England Culinary Institute.

ProStart is a career-building program of the National Restaurant Association that offers classroom study, mentored work experience, and local and national competitions for more than 90,000 high school students in over 1,650 schools in 47 states, territories and districts. More than 2,600 students representing 36 schools participate in the program in Nevada. For more information, visit www.prostart.restaurant.org.

About the Nevada Restaurant Association Educational Foundation

The Nevada Restaurant Association Educational Foundation (NvRAEF) was founded in 2001 and is a non-profit organization dedicated to the educational, research, and philanthropic needs of the hospitality industry. The NvRAEF is the state sponsor of the ProStart program, which is a national high school culinary and foodservice management program aimed at introducing students to the culinary industry while providing training and instruction in marketable skills. For more information on the ProStart program, please contact education@nvrestaurants.com.