

TASTE

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MONDAY, OCTOBER 9, 1995

TASTE BUDS



CHEF LARRY JONES

National competition showcases beefy recipes

The National Beef Cook-Off showcases beef in contemporary meals developed by amateur cooks from across the country. Contestants are challenged to create innovative, quick cooking recipes with beef.

The rules are simple: recipes must be exclusively beef, preparation and cooking time must be less than 60 minutes, the recipe can contain no more than eight ingredients.

"Sounds simple" you say? According to Cynthia Hodges of Ann Arbor who was one of this year's 15 national finalists (and who has entered the contest before), "winning the Michigan Beef Cook-off first helped me gain the confidence needed to pull off an entry in the National Cook-off."

Hodges, who has a baby due sometime in December, admitted that she "must have fine tuned her entry recipe at least a hundred times" and tried it out on her husband Andy, relatives, neighbors, friends and co-workers at Ford Motor Company in Dearborn where she is an engineer.

"It was an honor just having a cook-off contestant representing the great state of Michigan" piped in Maggie Nelson of the Michigan Beef Council in Okemos.

Nelson said she was impressed with Cynthia's trendy recipe. It included stir-fried beef sirloin, dried Michigan cherries and pine nuts, an idea that came from one of Hodges' favorite restaurants, Craig Common's The Common Grill in Chelsea.

Although Hodges did not finish in the top five, an all expense paid trip to the cook-off in Little Rock, Ark., with her husband was "everything she had hoped for."

But just what is it that makes a winning recipe, especially a national winner? Hodges, along with many of the other cook-off entrants, subscribe to "The Cooking Contest Chronicle," a monthly newsletter that explains who's having contests, and offers tips on what it takes to enter a winning recipe.

Creating a winning recipe
Every single contestant that I queried at the cook-off agreed the most important part of entering a contest is to follow the two "R's" - Read and follow the Rules exactly.

And just where do you think winning ideas come from? The National Cattlemen's Association polled past winners and found that most winning ideas come from ideas in cookbooks and magazines followed closely by a favorite dish enjoyed at a restaurant.

Regardless of the source of inspiration, the end result must be an original recipe - not someone else's. Changing a title, substituting black beans for pinto and/or changing a seasoning or two does not turn a "borrowed" recipe into an "original."

The Cattlemen's Association also polled past judges who said they look for a recipe that is current for today's lifestyle; healthy, easy to prepare, readily available ingredients; and flavors that work well together.

Winning beef recipes all claimed to offer just what the judges were looking for - good, tasty recipes with a healthy slant that anyone can prepare.

So you think you have a winning recipe? The folks at the 21st National Beef Cook-Off offered 15 contestants a chance at over \$45,000 in cash prizes, not to mention designer Tappan ranges, microwave ovens and Stouben crystal vases. All of this is in addition to the all expense paid trip to wherever the cook-offs are.

The next contest will be in Tampa, Fla. National Cook-off contestants are treated like royalty. In addition to having all of the finalist's recipes appear in national television promotions featuring the well-known "Beef - It's What's For Dinner" slogan.

And if you think the beef industry is shelling out big bucks for their contest, the folks at Pillsbury have topped this year's ante in their national bake-off to over one million dollars!

If you would like additional information on how to enter the beef cook-off, or would like to request a colored brochure highlighting all 15 of this year's contestants, and their recipe, in the 21st National Beef Cook-Off, send a self-addressed stamped envelope to: The National Beef Cook-Off, 444 North Michigan Ave., Chicago, Illinois 60611.

See winning recipes inside. Chef Larry is a freelance writer for the Observer & Economist Newspapers. To leave a voice mail message for him dial (313) 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone, then mail box number 1896.

LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

- Chef Larry Jones is hooked on catfish.
- Eleanor & Ray Heald dispel myths about Spanish wines.

BY DIANE HANSON
SPECIAL WRITER

The Michigan Chefs de Cuisine Junior Hot Foods Team, coached by Oakland Community College faculty member Daniel Rowison and Chef David Iselli (an OCC graduate) was really cooking up a storm at the 1995 National Convention of the American Culinary Federation in New York City.

The team comprised of students from Oakland Community College in Farmington Hills, and Schoolcraft Community College in Livonia even overcame an unbelievable obstacle. Due to an oversight on the part of the competition organizers, the fish Rowison's team received in a "mystery basket" of ingredients was rotten.

Rowison said he was extremely proud of how his team handled the situation and compensated for the loss of an important part of their menu while under such pressure and scrutiny.

Their composure, quick thinking, cooking expertise, and skill in preparation and presentation captured a first place award, gold medal, and trophies for the team at the convention.

"This is really quite a feat because it's very rare for students from different culinary schools to work together," explained Rowison, a chef instructor in the Culinary Arts program at OCC for the past 16 years.

"It was a great thing." This was the third annual cook-off sponsored by R. L. Schreiber, Inc., a major food supplier. The competition was between four regional winning teams, the culmination of hours of practice.

The practice started in November with requests for 22 students from Oakland Community College, Macomb Community College, and Schoolcraft Community College. Competitors had to be a student in the culinary arts program, or an apprentice, and a member of the American Culinary Federation.

Two Michigan Chefs de Cuisine Junior Hot Food Teams of four students each from the area schools were formed with one alternate. They immediately began weekly six-hour practice sessions where they would be given what is known as a "mystery basket" of food similar to what would be used in competition. The basket contained main ingredients like fish, meat, greens, vegetables and fruits. The students would have a limited amount of time to prepare a menu, cook a four-course meal, and present the food on plates ready to serve.

Both teams participated in the American Culinary Federation 1995 Central Region Conference Junior Hot Food Competition in New Orleans on March 4 to qualify for the national competition.

The two Michigan Chefs de Cuisine teams placed fourth with a silver medal and first with a gold medal.

The fourth place, silver medal team was comprised of OCC students Aaron Carmichael, (Oxford), and Norma Parker, (Waterford);



Culinary team's SUCCESS no 'mystery'



Winning team: Top photo: Karen Williams (left to right), Gernell Franklin, Maurice Hodson, Sean O'Rourke (team captain), Donna Pylar and coach Dan Rowison. The winning menu consisted of Summer Garden Vegetable Soup with Onion Custard and Tomato Focaccia, prepared by Donna Pylar; Shrimp, Artichoke and Scallop Basil Salad with fresh Dijon Pasta and Spring Greens prepared by Maurice Hodson; Herb-crusted Pork loin, Mushroom Ragout, Orange-Apple Chutney, Potato-Leek Puree, Sautéed Savoy Cabbage, Haricots Vert and Carrot Ribbon prepared by team captain, Sean O'Rourke; and Raspberry Buckle with Cinnamon Praline Ice Cream prepared by Karen Williams.

Macomb Community College student, Scott Fuernstetter, (Fraser); and Schoolcraft Community College student, Mark Talerico, (Detroit).

The gold medal team capturing first place, and a shot at the national title, were OCC students Maurice Hodson, (Farmington Hills); Sean O'Rourke, (Warren); and Donna Pylar, (Livonia) and Schoolcraft Community College student Karen

Williams, (Bloomfield Township).

The winning team began cooking again in April with weekly practice sessions at area restaurants using different equipment and "mystery baskets" supplied by various chefs who evaluated the student's performance.

Practice continued through May and June until the well-oiled cooking team, including alternate-advis-

What's cooking at local colleges

Oakland Community College

Restaurants: Ridgewood Cafe & Bakery, 1-305 of Turrell Hall, Orchard Ridge Campus, 27005 Orchard Lake Road, Farmington Hills. Open for lunch, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Monday-Thursday. No reservations needed. Call (810) 471-7786 for information, and to make reservations for special dinners.

• **European Dinner Express Train** - 6:30 p.m. (cash bar) 7 p.m. (dinner seating) Thursday, Oct. 26 - Each course will represent one of the countries traveled through by the Orient Express. Tickets \$25 per person. Call for reservations.

• **Wassail Feast** - 6:30 p.m. (cash bar) 7 p.m. (dinner seating) Thursday, Nov. 30 - Visit Merry Old England for this traditional holiday feast with entertainment. Tickets \$35 per person, should be reserved well in advance.

Schoolcraft Community College

Restaurants: American Harvest, in the Waterman Campus Center, 16600 Hagerty Road, Open for lunch noon to 1 p.m. Tuesday-Friday.

• **International buffet dinners** offered Wednesdays with seatings at 6 & 7:45 p.m. A different international cuisine is featured each week. Reservations required for lunch and dinner, call (313) 462-4489.

• **Gourmet Breakfast Buffet** offered 7:30-9 a.m. Thursday mornings through Dec. 14 in the Waterman Campus Center Cafeteria. Cost \$3.75 per person, reservations not necessary.

• **Professor's Pantry** in the Waterman Campus Center offers bakery and other items made by culinary classes. The pantry is open noon to 3 p.m. Tuesday-Friday. Call (313) 462-4491 for information.

• **Meatball dinners** - 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, Dec. 7-9 - return to the 16th century and dine on Elizabethan fare. Guests will be treated to "period" entertainment. Tickets \$35 per person. Tables seat eight. Call (313) 462-4417 for reservations.

er-manager, Gernell Franklin of the Bloomfield Hills Country Club, traveled to New York City for the national competition.

They competed against winning teams from the other three regions - Northeast (Balsalm Resort, N. H.); Southeast (Puerto Rico); and West represented by Orange County, Calif.

Teams received identical "mystery baskets." They had 30 minutes to plan a menu for a four-course meal to serve ten people. They had four hours to prepare the meal and 20 minutes to serve it.

Seven judges critiqued the effort, and 65 percent of the score was based on taste.

Meals were evaluated on creativity, culinary skills, sanitation, teamwork, and final product appeal.

"It was really something," said an elated Rowison upon capturing first place.

See recipes inside.

Make cookies in four sizes from one recipe

Cookies come in lots of different sizes these days. They can be itty bitty, as big as a pizza, and nearly every size in-between. And, they all can be made from the same dough - if you know just a couple of baker's secrets.

First, you'll need a recipe for a good basic drop cookie like a classic oatmeal cookie. Next, there's the size to consider - how big (or small) you'd like the finished cookies to be. This will determine the baking time and possibly the oven temperature as well. As a general rule of thumb, the larger the cookie, the longer the baking time. For very large cookies, it's necessary to reduce the oven temperature 25 degrees to prevent the cookie from over baking around the edges before it is baked in the center.

The "Mini to Monsters Oatmeal Cookie" is the perfect oatmeal cookie for the job.

Included with the basic recipe are directions for shaping and baking "minis" (1-inch), "in-the-middle" (2-1/2 inch), "megs" (4 inches) and "monsters" (12 inches).

The following tips from the Quaker Kitchen will help ensure that large, small or in-between, every batch will be perfect.

■ For the "in-the-middle," use a measuring

teaspoon. Round the dough just over the top of the teaspoon and use your little finger to push dough from teaspoon onto cookie sheet.

■ When making the "minis," use miniature chocolate pieces.

■ For the "in-the-middle," use a measuring tablespoon and a small rubber spatula to push dough from tablespoon onto cookie sheet. To allow for spreading, space dough 2 inches apart.

■ For the "megs," measure dough with a 1/4 cup measure (dough should be level with the top of the measuring cup) and use a rubber spatula to transfer dough onto cookie sheet. Leave at least 4 inches between each cookie.

■ To prevent dough from sticking to fingers when shaping the "monster" try dipping fingers into granulated sugar.

■ Preheat oven according to the cookie size you've selected, and test cookies after the minimum baking time. For chewy cookies, your finger should leave a small impression in the center. For crisp cookies, centers should feel firm to the touch.

■ Let "megs" and "monsters" cool a few minutes on the cookie sheet to firm up before transferring to a cooling rack. When transfer-



Customized cookies: By adjusting the oven temperature and baking time, "mini, in-the-middle, mega and monster" cookies can all be made from the same basic recipe.

ring the "monster," use two large wide spatulas or pancake turners.

■ To serve the "monster," place cookie on cutting board and use a sharp knife to cut into wedges, pizza-style.

See recipe inside.