

# Viva from page D1

"Everybody tastes (your dish) and we get the input from all the chefs," Rohnert said. "Sometimes it's hard to hear that someone doesn't like it." But the team works well together, and the dishes fall have to go together. Rohnert considers the cooking the fun part. "The hardest part is cleaning and doing your setup."

The competition helps team members measure themselves against their peers, said Bonilla of Westland, who works at the Red Robin Restaurant in Novi. The team practices so much and spends so much time together, "you are almost like brothers and sisters," Bonilla said.

The national competition is a little different from the regional. "There's a little bit more pressure, but at the same time, you're more focused."

Frankel of Ferndale caters for the Holiday Market in Royal Oak. Frankel says the competitions and class have improved her knife skills "tremendously." The team also pulls together even though they come from different backgrounds, Frankel said. "You really see the necessity of doing things over and over again."

Team members also need to decide when to stop revising a dish, with the coach's help, of course. "You need to look at their comfort level in their preparation and the dish and whether they are fully comfortable with

it," Gawronski said. Bonilla created a sautéed lake perch with a crayfish mousse and a crayfish cream sauce. "All the flavors blend together, which is the most important part," Bonilla said about his dish. Gawronski said the crayfish stock and crayfish meat sweetens the dish, while a grapefruit relish adds a tartness.

## Frankel's tomato tartar

Frankel looks forward to preparing a tomato tartar with a balsamic oil dressing with micro-arugula greens and grilled red onions with fried green tomatoes and savory garlic cookie.

"We tried to change the dishes to reflect the seasonality," Frankel said. "We thought the end of July is a good time for tomatoes."

Gawronski said the heirloom tomatoes are not as disease-resistant as hybrids, but the taste is outstanding. "And if you bite into a microfennel (a miniaturized version of the bulb), it just explodes," Gawronski said of the flavor. All the flavors, including the garlic cookie and goat cheese are "fun" in this dish, Gawronski said.

Frankel's dish also features a special blend of balsamic vinegar that costs, ooh, only \$85 a bottle.

Bell hopes to woo judges with her seared duck breast with a smoked duck sausage and duck epigramme with corn Cheyenne in a corn crepe and puree of

summer lettuce.

And what is an epigramme? Glad you asked...

"The leg and thigh meat is braised, then you pull the meat out and chop it up, press it in a pan, add the stock, refrigerate it and let it get really cold, then cut it into small pieces, bread it and fry it," Bell said.

A tough dish, Bell admits, to prepare in one hour and 15 minutes. An epigramme is a classic French cooking method, and "very old world," said Gawronski. "The entire dish is used."

The duck sausage is made with the other duck leg, and smoked briefly with alder wood, while a duck breast is marinated with red wine, herbs and olive oil. It is cooked at a very low heat, rendering some of the duck fat, then it cooked at a higher temperature.

Oh, yes, then there's dessert.

Rohnert will be making a strawberry sorbet with a strawberry and rhubarb caramel sauce, and a pistachio tuile cookie with a caramelized sugar cage and fresh berries with a lemon pound cake. That dish features a beautiful frozen parfait and a white and milk chocolate creating an "illusion of shadowing," Gawronski said.

Reeves of Livonia works at Patisserie Parmentier in Novi. As an alternate, he has to be ready for anything.

Reeves has to be able to fill in for any of his teammates if they

can't participate, so he has to know all the recipes and sauces. He also helps prep dishes, looks at equipment needs and cleans up.

"You have to be ready," Reeves said. "You have to keep an eye on where they are at in their dishes to get the things that are needed. It's a matter of communication, because they can't communicate with their coach."

## Pacing the sideline

Where does this leave coach Gawronski? Why, he just stands and watches on the sideline, if he can. "Nine times out of ten, I'll just walk away," Gawronski said. "I'll get nervous, and I don't want them to see that." Coaches can't talk to the participants during the 75 minutes of competition.

All four teams will start simultaneously during a knife competition in which participants cut the various knife cuts. Judges will examine their cuts. Then each team begins cooking, each separated by 20 minutes, preparing four dishes of the four-course meal. They have 15 minutes to serve it.

Practicing 3-9 p.m. six or seven days a week, plus working full-time can take its toll.

"It's exhausting," Bell said. "But I've learned a lot. You learn the importance of communicating and teamwork, making sure the orders come in and cleaning up and putting the produce away."

# Food fuels festivals

Food is the focus of more than 50 festivals held throughout Michigan during the warm-weather travel season.

Cities and towns from Armada to Zeeland have annual celebrations honoring a particular edible, with more than half of them occurring during the peak travel season between the Independence Day and Labor Day holidays.

Folks in Elsie must have figured that since their town bears the name of one of the world's most famous cows, a dairy festi-

val would be appropriate; they have one (July 12-14 this year).

Other food-focused community parties in July include the Cornfest in Auburn (July 12-15); the Family Fun and Perch Festival in Anchorville (July 13-15); the Michigan Blueberry Festival in Alpena (July 14-22); the Wine and Food Festival in Harrieville (July 21); the Potato Festival in Munger (July 26-29); the Bologna Festival in Yale (July 27-29); and the Pickle Celebra-

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# Sensations from page D1

microwave on high for 25 seconds to soften. Stir in the cornstarch, lemon juice and almond extract. Add peaches and mix well.

Place the peach mixture in a 7-by-11-inch or 9-by-9-inch pan. Microwave on high for three minutes. Stir well and microwave again on high for three minutes. Stir and continue microwaving at one-minute intervals until the mixture is thick and bubbling. Sprinkle with oat mixture and serve warm. Serves 8.

Nutritional information per serving: calories, 176; protein, 4g; carbohydrates, 39g; fat, 1g; dietary fiber, 6g; and cholesterol, 0g

## ENERGIZING PEACH SMOOTHIE

1 ripe, sliced peach (peel on)  
1 cup orange juice  
1/2 cup fat free vanilla yogurt  
4 ice cubes

Whirl all ingredients in a blender or food processor until smooth. Serve immediately for quick refreshment. Serves 1.

## PEACH MELBA

4 ripe peaches  
2 cups water

2/3 cup granulated sugar  
1-cup fresh or frozen raspberries  
Juice of 1/2 lime  
1 tablespoon Kirsch or raspberry brandy (optional)  
1 tablespoon granulated sugar  
2 cups vanilla ice cream or frozen vanilla yogurt  
2 tablespoons silvered almonds

Blanch peaches for 1 minute in boiling water and remove peel. Cut peaches in half and remove the stones. Combine the 2 cups water and 2/3-cup sugar in a saucepan. Bring to a boil and cook for 1 minute, then add the peaches and poach them for 8 minutes. Remove from heat and let cool in the syrup. Drain and place in the refrigerator.

Puree the raspberries in a food processor and pass through a fine sieve. Add the lime juice, optional Kirsch or brandy, and the tablespoon of sugar.

Divide ice cream among four dessert bowls. Add the peach halves and drizzle with raspberry sauce. Sprinkle with almonds. Serves 4.

# Eateries from page D1

Let's start with the preparator. A good cook must be a skilled practitioner, meaning that they were formally trained or have years of on-the-job training, but usually they have both. If the cooks do not know proper cooking methods, cooking times and the thousand other bits of knowledge needed to cook properly, even the freshest fish or highest quality meat can be reduced to mediocre.

They must balance flavors, textures and cooking methods to sustain food that looks and tastes great. Excellent restaurants employ excellent chefs, cooks and service people.

Have you ever eaten a very expensive meal and left the restaurant feeling dissatisfied and cheated? Conversely, you may have had a very expensive meal that you felt was worth more than the price paid. Well-prepared food can easily mitigate the cost/value equation.

When restaurant groups survey their customers, service is usually the most noted area of customer dissatisfaction.

Great food can be ruined by poor service. Great service focuses solely on customer satisfaction. It occurs only with deliberate effort and constant training and supervision.

Training includes more than learning a greeting. That's more than stating "Hello, my name is Jim, and I'll be your server

tonight" to produce favorable service.

A good server is trained to pay attention to a customer's disposition and try to anticipate their needs. Customers should not need to ask for condiments, glasses of water, or tableware needed to eat a course.

A great server derives pleasure from knowing that they have made the dining experience pleasant and effortless.

Ambiance is the physical surroundings, the music in the background, but most of all, it is the feeling of comfort and warmth that you get when you dine at an excellent restaurant.

When a customer feels that they are part of the success of a restaurant and they are treated as welcomed guests, the dining experience is complete. Even if the food and service were superb, a guest will not return if they don't feel welcomed.

Conclusion: Perceived value is in the eye of the beholder, but excellence is only achieved through knowledge and dedication. It is the little nuances, training and most of all, the desire, to please the guest that distinguishes the restaurant between the mundane and the great.

Bruce Konowalow is the director of the Culinary Arts Department at Schoolcraft College and a Taste columnist.

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