



WEST IS BEST AT CANADIAN CULINARY CHAMPIONSHIPS

February 11, 2008

Toronto, ON: Following three intensely competitive evenings, it was Chef Melissa Craig of Bearfoot Bistro in Whistler, who emerged as Canada's Best Chef as part of the Canadian Culinary Championships held in Toronto February 7, 8 and 9. Toronto's Anthony Walsh of Canoe was awarded the silver medal and Roland Menard of Manior Hovey, representing the Montreal region, took home bronze.

The competition began Thursday evening with a Black Box Challenge held in the instructional kitchens of George Brown College. The seven competing chefs had one hour to prepare two dishes using six mystery ingredients, which included two Georgian Bay whitefish, Top Meadow Farms flank steak, a celery root, a bag of Ontario peanuts, a honeycomb oozing honey and a handful of green plantains.

Friday evening was the Mystery Wine Pairing, whereby chefs prepared a dish they felt perfectly suited the mystery bottle of wine they had received the evening before, a delicious Closson Chase Chardonnay by winemaker Deborah Paskus. They were also given \$400 to shop for ingredients to feed the 150+ guests in attendance. Invited guests were able to taste the chefs' creations and cast their own ballot. Emerging as the people's choice winners for this single event were: Gold - Anthony Walsh, Toronto, Silver - Michael Moffatt, Ottawa, Bronze - Judy Wu, Edmonton.

There were no obvious frontrunners heading into the Grande Finale event Saturday, held at Toronto's Arcadian Court. But it was Melissa Craig's King crab dish that captured gold. She presented a small cone of bamboo leaf with a tender flesh from the claw inside, garnished with tobiko and some soy-sauce pop rocks. There was a delicately flavoured crab croquette, spherical and golden-crust, sitting on a little pool of mango-basil purée. Lastly, a demitasse of king crab soup - white, full-bodied with coconut milk and with a gentle lemongrass and chili hit. Melissa paired the dish with a bracingly acidic Tantalus Vineyards Riesling 2006 which the judges deemed to be the best wine match of the evening.

An underdog in the truest sense, 28-year old Melissa Craig was a last minute contender, asked to step in as the silver medallist representing Vancouver when the city's gold medal chef, Pino Posteraro could not make the national finals.

The judges – all leading Canadian food and wine critics, headed by James Chatto - were impressed with each of the competing chefs' dishes that best exemplified creativity, brilliance and individuality during each of the competitions.

Chatto, author and restaurant critic for Toronto Life Magazine, said that "there was much more parity between the contestants this year" at the final competition. "There was no clear winner from the beginning. All seven chefs were within six percentage points of each other, which meant that anybody could win it which was quite exciting."

"Gold Medal Plates was delighted to stage this year's Canadian Culinary Championships in Toronto," said Stephen Leckie, CEO and Founder of Gold Medal Plates. "The three-evening competition was highly entertaining for guests, competitive and truly showed the substantial culinary talent and quality of wine that Canada has to offer."

The weekend was graced with numerous celebrities such as Jim Cuddy of Blue Rodeo, Sonja Smits, Justin Trudeau and triple Olympic medalists - Marnie McBean and Curt Harnett.

Gold Medal Plates would like to thank each of the chefs for participating in the Canadian Culinary Championships which celebrates Canadian excellence in cuisine, wine and athletics.

The seven competing chefs:

Melissa Craig of Bearfoot Bistro in Whistler (Vancouver)

Paul Rogalski of Rouge (Calgary)

Judy Wu of Wild Tangerine (Edmonton)

Anthony Walsh of Canoe (Toronto)

Michael Moffatt of Beckta Dining and Wine (Ottawa-Gatineau)

Roland Ménard of Manoir Hovey (Montréal)

Martin Ruiz Salvador of Fleur de Sel (Halifax)

About Gold Medal Plates

Since its inception, Gold Medal Plates has donated more than \$2.4 million to support Canadian Olympic and Paralympic athletes and has elevated the profile of Canadian cuisine and wine. For more information visit www.goldmedalplates.com

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