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Thursday, January 27, 2011

Area chefs to face off for annual contest



Judges for Worcester's Best Chef include, from left: Andrew LaHaye, Chris Liazos, Christiana Ernst (owner of Via Alto 27, who is a participant, not a judge), Stanley Nicas and Paul Wilson. (T&G Staff/JIM COLLINS)

By Barbara M. Houle SPECIAL TO THE TELEGRAM & GAZETTE
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Worcester's Best Chef culinary competition Jan. 30 in Mechanics Hall, 321 Main St., Worcester, is promoted as the premier culinary event in central New England.

There are many reasons why this annual competition is successful, attracting 600 to 700 guests.

The audience definitely is drawn to the competitors who are local chefs and restaurateurs. Guests get to taste the chefs' signature dishes, and then vote for their favorite in The People's Choice Award.

This year, the "guest" celebrity judge at the event will be Barry E. Sexton, who was featured on the Food Network's "Dinner Impossible" starring Robert Irvine. Sexton is executive chef/owner of Opinionated Palate Catering/Consulting in Elkins Park, Pa. He graduated from the Philadelphia Art Institute and believes that "great food is a combination of bold tastes, textures and color."

Sexton, who was classically trained in French cuisine, has worked at premiere restaurants and hotels in Pennsylvania. An award-winning chef, he also has worked with Food Network chefs, including Tyler Florence and Duff Goldman of Ace of Cakes. He has participated in many food and wine festivals and food shows throughout the United States.

Billy Costa from "TV Diner" will host Worcester's Best Chef with Jen and Steve of the In the Morning show on WXLO 104.5 FM.

Worcester's Best Chef tickets: VIP admission is from 5 to 6 p.m. VIP single ticket, \$70; VIP couple, \$120.

General admission is from 6 to 9 p.m. Tickets cost \$55 per person; \$100 per couple.

Visit www.worcestersbestchef.com, www.mechanicshall.org or the Mechanics Hall box office for tickets.

Proceeds benefit the culinary arts program at Worcester Technical High School. Students enrolled in the program will assist chefs at the competition. They also will present competitors' dishes to the judges.

Participating restaurants: Baba Sushi, Evo Restaurant & Bar, The Flying Rhino Café, The People's Kitchen and Byblos Lounge, all in Worcester; Bridge Street Bistro in Grafton; BT's Smokehouse, Cedar Street Restaurant, Kaizen Sushi Bar and Grill, Oliver Wight Tavern at Old Sturbridge Village and The Publick House, all in Sturbridge; Cardoo's Catering in North Grafton; Tavolino in Westboro; Via Alto 27 in Clinton, and Feng Asian Bistro & Hibachi in Millbury.

I will join the panel of "celebrity" judges: Stanley J. Nicas, executive chef/owner of the Castle Restaurant in Leicester; Chris Liazos, chef and former owner of the Webster House Restaurant in Worcester; Alina Eisenhauer, executive pastry chef/owner of Sweet in Worcester and a former competitor on Food Network's "Chopped"; Paul Wilson, executive chef of Pepper's Fine Foods Catering in Northboro; Christina Andrianopoulos, host of "Dining Out MetroWest," and Andrew J. LaHaye, executive chef of Woodland Golf Club in Newton, formerly of Sterling Country Club, who last year was a triple winner in the Worcester's Best Chef Competition, walking away with the judges' award in the fine dining category, the People's Choice Award for fine dining and Iron Chef title.

The culinary event will feature wineries and craft beer brewers in addition to Sir Jeremy Bell, who will provide an "interactive Rum & Revolution exhibition."

See you there!

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La Scala Restaurant, 183 Shrewsbury St., Worcester, recently put "All You can Eat Chicken Night" on its menu. The special is from 4 to 9 p.m. Wednesdays.

Cost for roasted chicken, pasta, salad and French fries, with dark meat, \$10.95, with white meat, \$11.95.

Fish & chips will be served Friday nights beginning in February. Hours will be from 4 to 10 p.m.

La Scala is open for lunch from 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Tuesdays through Fridays; dinner, 4 to 9 p.m. Tuesdays through Thursdays; 4 to 10 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays. It's closed Sundays and Mondays, but it will open for private functions.



Guest celebrity judge Barry E. Sexton.

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More about the menu at www.lascalashrewsbury.com.

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The Castle Restaurant, 1230 Main St., Leicester, will have "Valentine's Weekend" Feb. 11-14. Full menu available. Reservations recommended.

For more information, call (508) 892-9090.

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An in-store "walking around and tasting" of liqueurs, wine, champagne and specialty brews will take place from 3 to 6 p.m. Feb. 12 at **Friendly Discount Liquors**, 1167 Providence Road, Whitinsville.

Among businesses providing pastries will be Eaton Farm Confectioners of Sutton and the Valley Café in Northbridge.

To RSVP to the event, call (508) 234-7951.

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Wonder bread has kicked off a national search for America's everyday heroes — ordinary people who make extraordinary contributions to their families, communities or country — who will be honored as "Wonder Heroes."

Grand prize winners will be featured on limited edition Wonder packaging and will win a trip to New York City, a \$1,000 gift card and a year's supply of Wonder bread. Additional heroes will be selected as first prize-winners and will receive a \$500 gift card and a year's supply of Wonder bread.

The deadline for Wonder Mom nominations is Jan. 30; Wonder Dad and Wonder Patriot are due by Feb. 13.

Contest rules can be found at www.wonderbread.com and www.facebook.com/wonderbread.

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Chobani has added several new flavors to its line of Greek yogurt flavors. Mango, black cherry and lemon and Chobani Champions, Greek yogurt for kids, are now available in local stores.

Chobani Champions are sold in four-packs and packaged in 3.5-ounce cups. Each cup contains 100 calories.

This month, consumers can celebrate their everyday "champions" on www.chobani.com/champions. Visitors can upload a photo of their "champion" to the online gallery for a chance to be selected as the "Champ of the Month." The winning champ will be featured on the home page for an entire month and will win a free case of yogurt and coupons.

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The Cook's Garden (www.cooksgarden.com) recently released its first annual food trends report showcasing leading culinary trends for the New Year.

The Cook's Garden is a leading source for gourmet vegetables, herbs and fruits for American chefs who are gardeners (and gardeners who are chefs).

It appears 2011 will be a breakthrough year for foodies and home cooking enthusiasts. The spike in demand for locally grown foods and ingredients will translate into healthier, more flavorful new dishes on American dinner tables, according to George Ball, proprietor of The Cook's Garden.

Food trends from The Cook's Garden: Rising interest in ethnic dishes and high demand for vegetables and herbs continues. The Cook's Garden reports that its popular ethnic varieties of herbs and vegetables include Pistou basil, Serrata basil, Italian Essence parsley, Krausa parsley and Yugoslavian red lettuce.

Also, look for mini dishes and tasting menus as more restaurant clients choose smaller portioned dishes.

No surprise that local and fresh ingredients dominate the dinner table. The Cook's Garden, along with its sister company, Burpee, has seen a steady increase in sales for seeds and vegetable plants in the past three years.

Think spring!

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National Pie Day was celebrated Jan. 23.

The Nation's Restaurants News reports that pies are the top restaurant trend for 2011.

According to the American Pie Council, there are 231 varieties of apple pie, the favorite of 36 million Americans.

Visit the council's website: www.piecouncil.org to browse "pie ideas" and award-winning recipes that can help anyone create the perfect pie.

If you have a tidbit for this column, call (508) 868-5282. Send e-mail to bhoulefood@gmail.com.



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- Area chefs to face off for annual contest (Jan 27, 2011)
- Kenwood keeps the regulars happy (Jan 20, 2011)
- DQ Blizzards are welcome (Jan 13, 2011)
- A treat for old East Park Grille fans (Jan 6, 2011)
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