



Living
Who will be the best chef?

City's biggest culinary competition takes the stage Sunday
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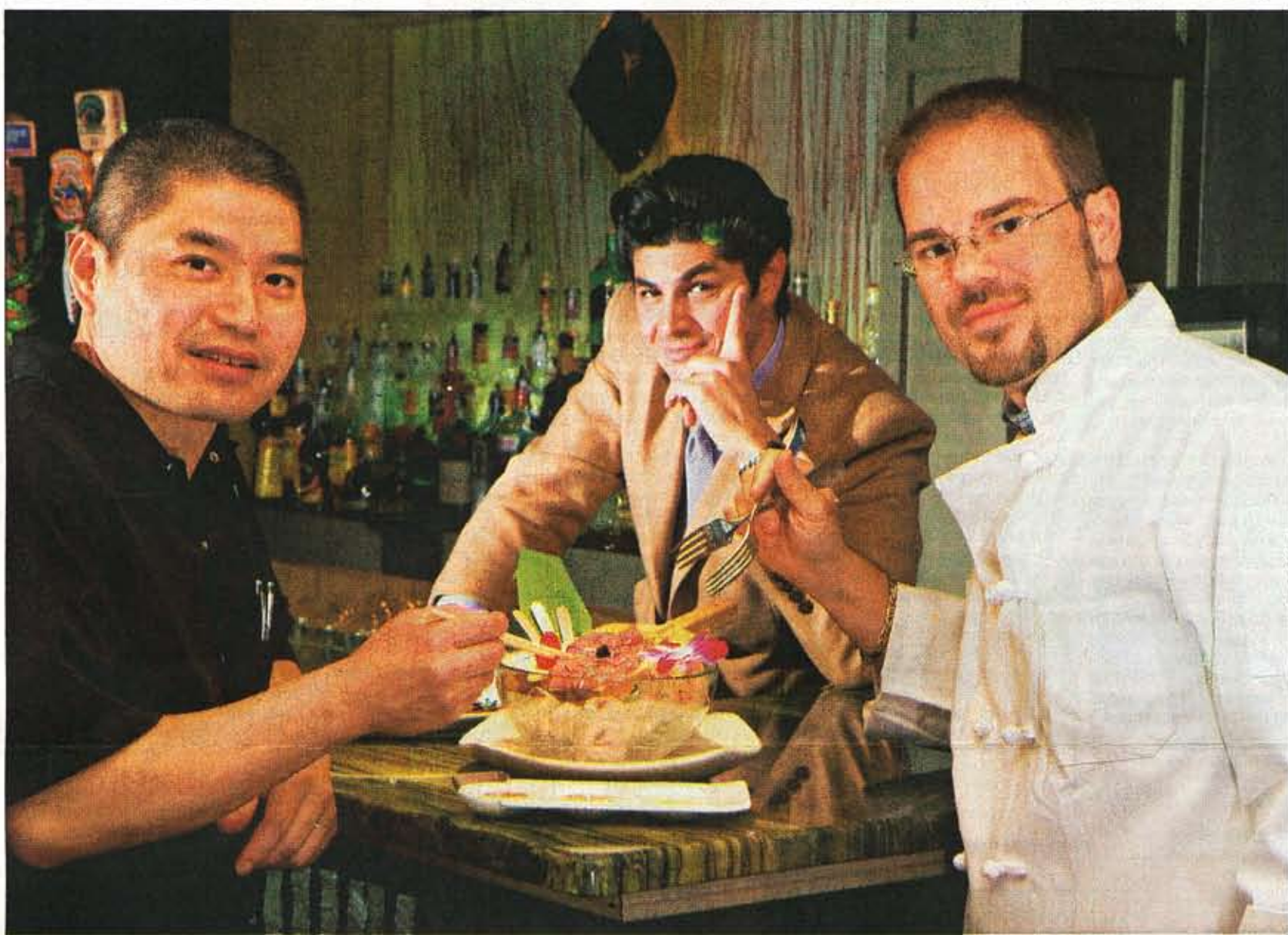
WORCESTER MASSACHUSETTS

60 CENTS

VYING FOR BEST CHEF

Worcester's Best Chef Competition

- **When:** 5 to 9 p.m. Sunday
- **Where:** Worcester Technical High School, 1 Skyline Drive, Worcester
- **How much:** \$40 per person, \$50 at the door; go to www.worcestersbestchef.com



ALEX WITKOWICZ

From left, Wilson Wang of Baba Restaurant and Sushi Bar in Worcester, Domenic D. Mercurio Jr. and Christopher Rovezzi of Rovezzi's Ristorante in Sturbridge do lunch at Baba before Wang and Rovezzi go head to head in the biggest culinary competition in the city.

By Barbara M. Houle
FOOD EDITOR

Competition moves to Worcester Technical High School

Wilson Wang of Baba Restaurant and Sushi Bar in Worcester and Christopher Rovezzi, chef/owner of Rovezzi's Ristorante in Sturbridge, have spent the past several weeks on a nonstop media blitz to promote the Worcester's Best Chef Competition, to be held from 5 to 9 p.m. Sunday at Worcester Technical High School.

It was high-fives and group hugs when I met the "best of buds," last week at Baba to talk about the event. Sunday, the chefs will face off in fierce competition with more than 20 other local chefs in an event that will bring more than a thousand foodies together for a fundraiser to benefit a new Culinary Scholarship Fund at Worcester Technical High School.

Worcester's Best Chef, the brainchild of Domenic D. Mercurio Jr., president of Mercury Media & Entertainment in Worcester, took place for the first time last year in Union Station. Wang and Mike Zhang, co-

owners of Baba Restaurant and Sushi Bar Restaurant, walked away with the first-place Judges' Award. Rovezzi won the first-place People's Choice Award.

Mercurio has joined chefs in media appearances to help promote the event on Sunday.

Tickets, online at www.worcestersbestchef.com, are \$40 per person; \$50 at the door. Valet parking will be available.

The event promises to be better than ever, according to Mercurio, who admitted there were a few snags last year as a result of an unexpected rush of ticket sales at the door. "We had prepared for about 800 to 900 people and we ended up with more than 1,500," he said. "There was a point toward the end of the evening when we were short on plates and other things. And Ouch!

"This year, we're prepared, well-prepared," Mercurio said. "Everything from the number of plates

and wine glasses to placement of rubbish containers have been carefully thought out," he said. "This is one of the biggest food events in the city. We want guests to have a good time."

Eight judges, including myself, will begin tasting dishes several hours before the public is admitted. The chefs will finish off entries in state-of-the-art commercial kitchens at the technical school. They will compete in these categories: American Fusion, Asian, Italian, Mediterranean, Seafood and Dessert.

Guests will be given a ballot to vote for their favorites in the People's Choice Awards. Your vote counts!

Wine vendors will be next to restaurants for the pairing of wine and food. One of the event sponsors, KJ Baaron's of Worcester, will provide exclusive vintage auction wines that Mercurio calls "well-aged stylish gems of superior vintage."

The evening festivities also will include live entertainment, including Salsa Storm Dance Studio in Worcester, center stage. A VIP area will feature Perrier-Joet Champagne and Sanderman's Port tastings. Noted toastmaster Sir Jeremy Bell will lead a Chivas Regal Scotch tasting.

Food and wine aside, the culinary students at Worcester Technical High School also are winners at this event. They not only benefit from some of the scholarship money, which helps with tuition, uniforms and other supplies, but also will share in the experience of shadowing the competing chefs.

No text book can provide that.

Tidbits: Chris Rovezzi said he is taking a component from last year's winning dish and adding it to his entry. Think back. Can you remember what he cooked up last year? His comment on Worcester's Best Chef: "Win or lose, it's an awesome feeling to be surrounded by great chefs. It's fun to be a participant and the pressure is on to win again." Rovezzi, who closed his Worcester and Rutland restaurants, is celebrating seven years in business in Sturbridge. "It's the busiest year ever," he said.

Wilson Wang and Mike Zhang plan to work shellfish into their sushi entry. "I think people will like the dish," Wang said. The chefs often put the taste test to customers when they think about adding a item on the restaurant menu. "If they (customers) like it, we go with it," Wang said. The chefs are looking to expand their business by opening another Worcester restaurant. They have scouted several locations, but no decision has been made, Wang said. "It will be soon," he said.

Participants at Worcester's Best Chef: 86 Winter American Bistro, TriBeCa Restaurant, The Belfry, Morocco Middle Eastern Cuisine, Chioda's Trattoria, Viva Bene Ristorante, Castellana's Restaurant, Sweet Pastry Shop and Dessert Bar, Baba Restaurant and Sushi Bar, Zipango Steak and Sushi, Haiku Sushi Restaurant, Bar and Grill and Mrs. Mack's Bakery, all in Worcester; Double Tree Hotel and Suites in Westboro; Tomasso Trattoria & Enoteca in Southboro; The Melting Pot in Framingham; Cedar Street Restaurant, Rovezzi's Ristorante and The Publick House, all in Sturbridge; Yama Zakura Sushi in Northboro; BT's Smokehouse in Brimfield; Two Cousins Pasta and Pizzeria in Southbridge and Via Alto in Clinton, which will have three of its chefs competing against each other.

