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# THE BEST

Winners cook up recipes  
for you to try at home



# CHEFS

BY BARBARA M. HOULE  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY TOM RETTIG

**W**hen it comes to culinary competitions, Worcester's Best Chef beats them all.

The event, which took place in January at Union Station, pitted the hottest new chefs against seasoned heavyweights.

A panel of six food judges (I was one of them) took almost four hours to blind taste and score 27 dishes. The food presentations were not only trendsetting, but over-the-top. The more than 1,500 guests in attendance also got to cast votes for their favorites in the People's Choice Awards.

Best Chef was sparked by wine importer Domenic Mercurio. His company, Mercury Media & Entertainment in Worcester, was the main sponsor. Mercurio's vision was to showcase local chefs in a venue that would bring foodies together for a charitable cause.

He succeeded, big time.

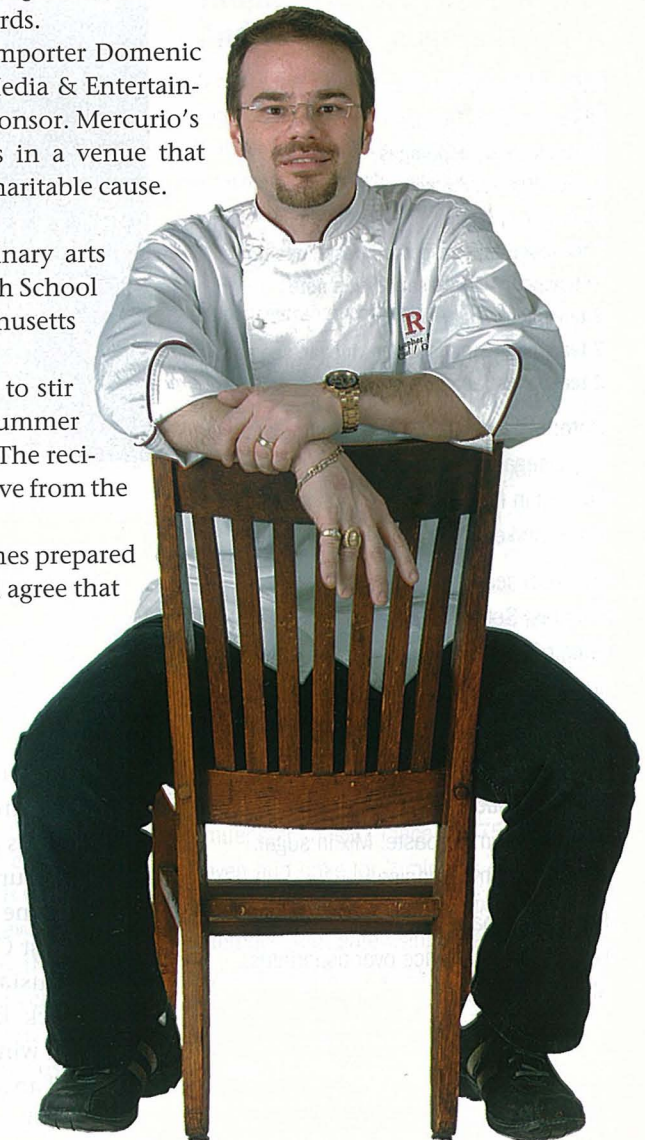
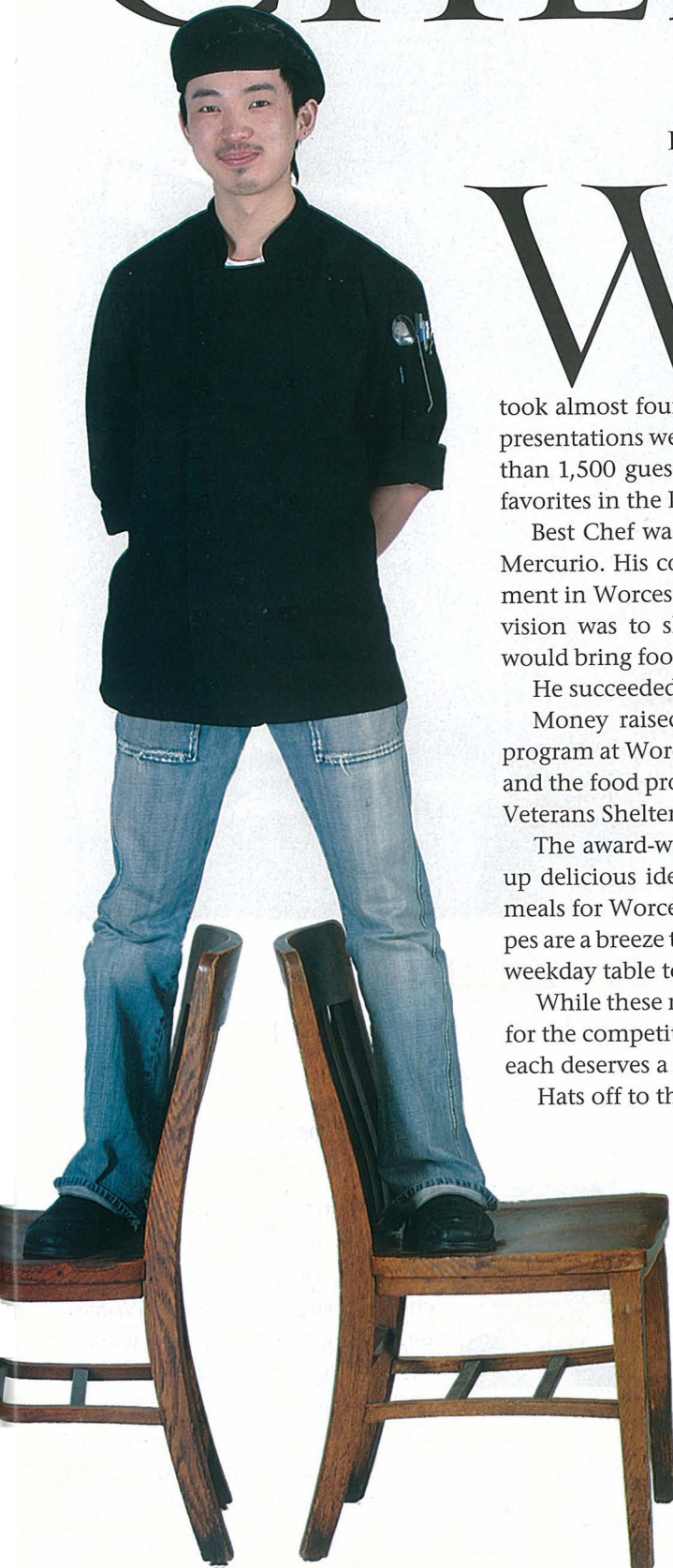
Money raised benefited the culinary arts program at Worcester Technical High School and the food program at the Massachusetts Veterans Shelter in Worcester.

The award-winning chefs agreed to stir up delicious ideas for spring and summer meals for Worcester Living readers. The recipes are a breeze to make, and can move from the weekday table to special occasion.

While these recipes are not the ones prepared for the competition, we think you'll agree that each deserves a first prize.

Hats off to the chefs.

Best chefs, from left, Hillery Smith, Robert Fecteau, Weidong Wang, Wen Zhang and Christopher Rovezzi. Not pictured is Dominic Geraghty of the Publick House in Sturbridge, first runner-up of the Judge's Award. Geraghty has since left the restaurant.





## Ba Ba Scallops And Asparagus

6 to 8 scallops

Olive oil, about 1-ounce

10 stalks fresh asparagus

Lemon Wasabi Sauce:

Juice from 1 lemon

1 teaspoon Japanese miso paste, see note

½ teaspoon wasabi sauce, see note

2 teaspoons sugar

2 teaspoons Japanese rice vinegar, see note

2 teaspoons Japanese mayonnaise, see note

**Note:** Miso paste, wasabi sauce, Japanese rice vinegar and mayonnaise can be purchased in local Asian markets and some supermarkets.

Pan sear scallops in olive oil about 4 minutes. Set aside. Snap off tough lower ends of asparagus and discard. Use vegetable peeler to peel asparagus stalks. Stir-fry asparagus in another pan with olive oil for about 2 minutes.

**To make sauce:** Mix together lemon juice, wasabi and miso paste. Mix in sugar, vinegar and mayonnaise.

Plate the asparagus and scallops. Pour Lemon Wasabi Sauce over asparagus. Makes 1 serving.



## Wen Zhang BA BA SUSHI RESTAURANT

Location: 309 Park Ave., Worcester

Telephone: (508) 752-8822

Chef/Owners: Weidong "Wilson" Wang, 38; Wen "Mike" Zhang, 23

The Prize: First place, Judges' Award

At first glance, Ba Ba Sushi Restaurant seems like just another sushi bar. It's anything but.

The restaurant opened in January, the same month it won Worcester's Best Chef. Upon winning, the enthusiastic owners threw their black berets into the air, kissed the winners' plaque and hugged each other and anyone who passed by.

Chinese-born, Wang and Zhang worked the restaurant circuit in New York City before



Weidong Wang

moving to the Worcester area. Wang is married with a young daughter. He previously was sushi chef at Zipango Sushi Bar in Worcester. Zhang, who is single, worked with Wang at Zipango.

The chefs thrive on creativity. They deliver beautiful sushi, and

their menu is full of little surprises.

Happy, grateful and humble, Wang and Zhang explain that in China, ba (eight) is a lucky number.



## Robert Fecteau CASTLE RESTAURANT

Location: 1230 Main St., Leicester

Telephone: (508) 892-9090

Owners: Stanley J. Nicas and his son and daughter, James S. and Evangeline H. Nicas

Sous Chef: Robert Fecteau, 27

The Prize: Second runner-up, Judges' Award;

Second runner-up, People's Choice Award

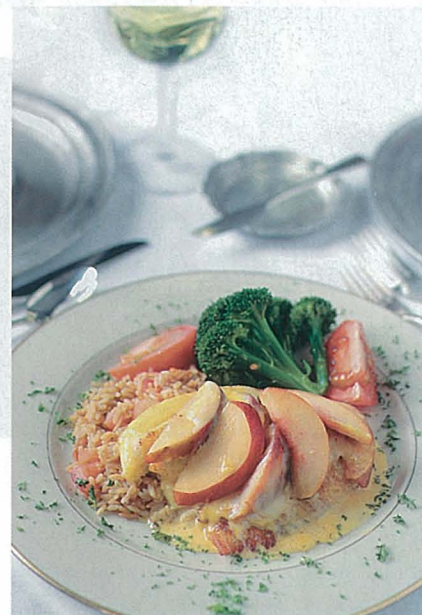
Fecteau started at the Castle as a busboy when he was a teenager. After culinary school in Colorado, he completed a three-year apprenticeship with executive chef/owner Stanley J. Nicas.

This is a confident young chef who puts his ego aside in the back of the house. Teamwork, he says, is key to a successful restau-

rant. His philosophy in the kitchen: He likes a challenge and admits he spends weeks and sometimes months creating a new dish.

Authentic ethnic cuisine tops this single chef's list of favorite foods to eat out.

A "surprised" winner, Fecteau says he competed with the thought, "I'm just going to do my best."



### Tilapia With Peaches And Cream

5-ounce filet of tilapia, see note

Flour or bread crumbs

1 ounce butter or butter substitute

1 medium ripe peach, white preferably

2 slices muenster cheese

¼ ounce lemon juice

1 ounce heavy cream

¼ ounce orange concentrate

**Note:** Sole, pork medallions or lightly pounded chicken breast can be substituted for tilapia.

Lightly flour and sauté the tilapia in half of the butter until golden brown on both sides, 2 to 3 minutes per side. Peel and slice peach into thin slices. Reserve 3 to 5 slices for garnish. Sauté remaining slices in butter until soft. Add lemon juice and orange concentrate to peaches and butter, reduce and add heavy cream. Move fish to casserole dish, top with peaches and cream mixture and add muenster cheese. Place in 375-degree oven and bake for 2 minutes or until the cheese melds with cream mixture. Remove and plate using reserved peach slices as garnish. Makes 1 serving.



## Vitello Milanese

- 4 large eggs
- 1½ cups all-purpose flour
- 2 cups plain dry bread crumbs
- 2 teaspoons dried basil
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme
- 2 pounds thinly sliced veal scallopine, see note
- Kosher salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 2 cups vegetable oil
- ½ cup fresh baby arugula
- ¼ cup chopped Roma tomatoes
- 2 to 3 pieces shaved Reggiano Parmigiano cheese

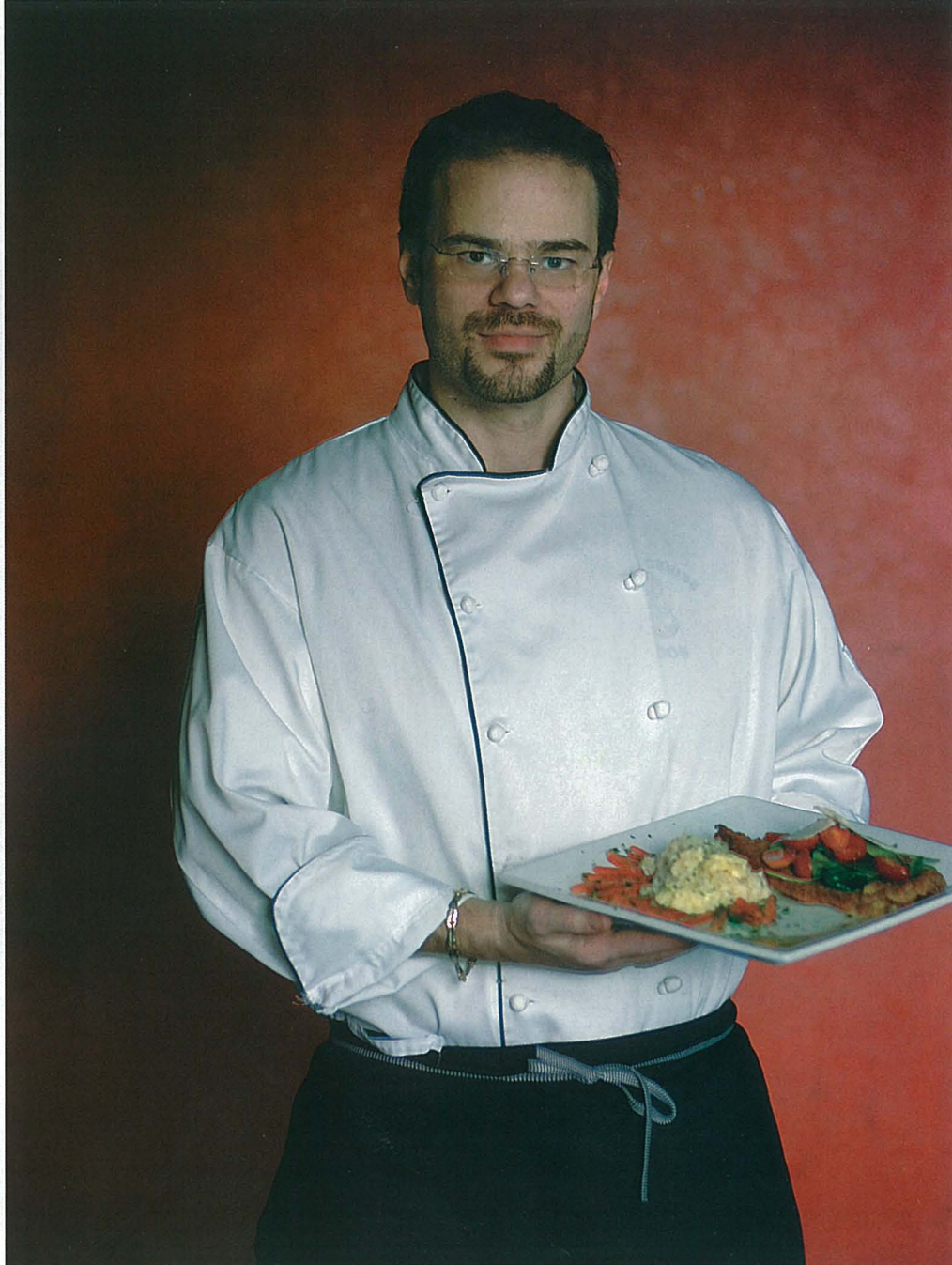
**Note:** Scallopine is an Italian term describing a thin scallop of meat, usually veal.

Preheat oven to 175 degrees. In shallow dish, beat eggs and season with salt and pepper. Pour flour into another shallow dish. Mix together bread crumbs, basil and thyme in a third shallow dish. Have ready a large plate.

Season veal with salt and pepper. Work with 1 slice of veal at a time: dip meat in flour, shaking off excess. Next, place floured veal into beaten eggs, coating completely. Place veal into bread crumb mixture and gently press crumbs into the veal. Set aside on large plate and continue with remaining veal.

In large skillet with high sides, heat oil to 375 degrees. Have ready a baking sheet fitted with a rack. Carefully place two pieces of breaded veal in the hot oil and fry until golden brown on both sides, about 6 to 8 minutes. Place cooked veal on rack, season with salt and place in oven to keep warm. Plate veal on large platter.

In mixing bowl, toss arugula and tomatoes with a dash of extra virgin olive oil, salt and pepper. Place arugula mixture on veal and shave Reggiano Parmigiano on top. Makes 4 servings.



## Christopher Rovezzi ROVEZZI'S RISTORANTE

Locations:

Rovezzi's Sturbridge, Routes 20 and 148, Sturbridge. Telephone: (508) 347-0100

Rovezzi's Ristorante, 108 Grove St., Worcester. Telephone: (508) 753-4511

Rovezzi's Trattoria, 249 Main St., Rutland. Telephone: (508) 886-4600

Executive chef/owner: Christopher Rovezzi, 39

The Prize: First place, People's Choice Award

Rovezzi has cooked since he was 18. His parents, Joseph Rovezzi and the late Shirley Rovezzi, owned the former popular dining spot Rovezzi's Restaurant in Worcester. Other Rovezzi children also work in the restaurant business.

Rovezzi, married 1½ years, says cooking is in his blood, and he never has felt comfort-

able in any other job. Authentic Italian dishes are his trademark. His training is back of the house with local chefs among his mentors.

Rovezzi is a Frank Sinatra fan, big time. After he accepted his Best Chef award, he wowed the crowd with an Ol' Blue Eyes impression.



### Golden Sea Bass Veracruz

2 pounds fresh golden sea bass or other white fish

¼ cup vegetable oil

Flour

½ cup red onions, julienned

½ cup yellow bell peppers, julienned

½ cup plum tomatoes, quartered

1 cup chardonnay wine

2 cups fish stock

¼ cup butter

Salt and pepper to taste

Focaccia, toasted

Cut fish into 8-ounce portions. Heat sauté pan and add ¼ cup oil. Coat fish with flour. Place in pan, flip once when golden brown.

Add onions, peppers and tomatoes. Once caramelized, deglaze with chardonnay. Add fish stock and reduce by half. Stir in butter until melted. Add salt and pepper to taste.

Serve over toasted focaccia. Makes 4 servings.

## Hillery Smith

### BIN 479 WINE BAR AND RESTAURANT

Location: 479 Main St., Sturbridge

Telephone: (508) 347-9952

Owner: Greg Meserole

Executive Chef: Hillery Smith, 24

The Prize: First runner-up, People's Choice Award

Smith was sous chef at Cedar Steak House at Foxwoods Resort Casino for five years before opening Bin 479 two years ago.

While at Foxwoods, she once cooked for entertainer Bill Cosby. Cosby made arrangements for his food to be shipped in, and Smith cooked it according to his specifications. It was a thrill to cook for the celebrity, she says.

The dish on the chef: She enjoys pairing

food and wine. Surf and turf is her most popular dish on the menu. She's a graduate in the culinary arts program at Manchester Community College in Manchester, Conn.

Smith will marry Clayton Errett, chef de cuisine at Bin 479, in the fall. The couple met "in the kitchen" at Foxwoods. When she's not rattling the pots and pans, Smith teaches dance classes including ballet, jazz and hip hop.