

Montana Chefs Recognized for Culinary Excellence

Susan Kovatch, chef and owner of The Lighthouse Restaurant, nearly two miles west of Valier on Highway 44, received a Silver Class award in the Culinary Excellence Award program held recently at Buck's T-4 Lodge in Big Sky.

Kovatch has been at the Lighthouse for 15 years. Her Silver Class award was in the dessert category for a creation titled: Blackberry Peach Crisp. (See recipe.)

Her advice to aspiring cooks: "Be consistent and use fresh and quality ingredients for all entrées. You need to have a passion for food that will lead to a great success in this business."

Nine chefs were selected to participate in the event, which was sponsored by the Montana Department of Agriculture to promote the use of Montana ingredients at fine dining restaurants. Food samples were prepared on the site and judged by a panel of local and national chefs and restaurant brokers.

Winning recipes will be placed on

the Travel Montana website.

"We hope to make this an annual event. The Montana Chef Competition encourages our state's chefs to incorporate more locally produced foods into their menus. This, in turn, helps Montana's agricultural industry," said Ralph Peck, director of the Montana Department of Agriculture.

Lieutenant Governor Karl Ohs announced the winners of the Culinary Excellence Awards. Rick Hilles, chef at Triple Creek Ranch, Darby, won the gold award in the appetizer and dessert categories. Eric Trager, chef at Bridge Creek Back Country Kitchen & Wine Bar, Red Lodge, won the gold award among main course entries.

The department worked with the Montana Restaurant Association and regional food service companies to plan the event, which also included an expo showcase of Montana products for restaurant managers, chefs, brokers and distributors.

Educational sessions featured local and nationally known chefs and industry leaders including Katy Keck, a culinary professional and journalist from New York City, and Dieter Doppelfeld, a Certified Master Chef and board member of the American Culinary Institute.

For more information on the event, contact Angelyn DeYoung, Montana Department of Agriculture marketing officer, at (406) 444-2402, or by email at agr@state.mt.us



Lighthouse Restaurant Chef Susan Kovatch displays her prize winning cuisine.

Steak with Mustard Sauce

Yield: 4 main course servings

Amount Ingredients

Steak

1 cup mustard sauce (see recipe)
4 - 6oz. Montana Legend Beef filets
Salt and black pepper
2 Tbsp. Olive oil
1 recipe Vegetable compote

Mustard Sauce

4 Tbsp. melted butter
1/4 cup flour
Salt and pepper
2-1/2 cups milk
1 cup shredded Parmesan cheese
4 Tbsp. Dijon mustard

Vegetable Compote

4 cups medium diced red skin potato, blanched
1 cup asparagus spears sliced into 1" lengths, blanched
1 cup Garden City Fungi Sliced Shiitake Mushrooms
1/2 cup diced green onion or shallots

Garnishes:

Chives, snipped

Method:

Mustard Sauce

Combine butter, flour, salt and pepper in 4-cup heat-resistant, microwaveable dish. Stir in milk and cook in microwave on HI power for 3-4 minutes. Whisk and stir in Parmesan cheese and Dijon mustard. Cook an additional 2-3 minutes until blended. Keep warm.

Steak

Prepare mustard sauce; reserve, keeping warm. Season filets with salt and pepper, heat oil in a medium skillet over med-high heat; sear both sides and cook to med-rare or desired doneness. Place on cutting board and using a sharp knife, cut into four portions. Keep warm. Add 4 tablespoons butter to skillet and sauté vegetable compote until heated through, 2-3 minutes. Remove from heat. Spoon the vegetable compote onto the center of the plate, place steak medallions overlapping each other onto vegetables. Drizzle mustard sauce over steak and garnish with snipped fresh chives. Serve immediately.

Blackberry Peach Crisp

Yield: 6 servings

Amount Ingredients

Fruit

1 cup sugar
2 Tbsp. instant tapioca, ground
(grind in coffee grinder)
1 pinch salt
4 cup fresh or frozen blackberries
1-1/2 lb. pitted and cubed peaches

Topping

1 cup all-purpose flour
1/2 cup sugar
1/2 tsp baking powder
1 pinch salt
4 Tbsp. unsalted butter, cubed
4 Tbsp. almond paste
1 egg
1/4 tsp. almond extract
1/4 cup Cream of the West Roasted
Wheat Cereal, cooked
1/3 cup sliced almonds

Garnishes: Dollop of whipped cream

Method:

Preheat oven to 400 degrees.
Butter six 6 oz. ramekins.

Fruit

Combine sugar, tapioca and salt in a large mixing bowl. Prepare peaches by lobing off sides around pits and cutting flesh into chunks (do not peel fruit). Add fruit to sugar mixture, drizzle with lemon juice and toss together. Divide into Ramekins, place them on a baking sheet to catch drips, and bake 15 minutes, until fruit begins to release juices.

Topping

Blend flour, sugar, baking powder and salt for topping in a mixing bowl. Cut in butter and almond paste until it looks like a coarse meal. Combine egg, extract and cereal in a small bowl. Add to butter mixture and stir just to blend. Divide topping evenly among each Ramekin. Sprinkle almonds on top of crisps and bake an additional 20-30 minutes, or until topping is golden and fruit juices are bubbly and thickened. Cool.



Keeping schools safe

“Safety first” is more than an old adage. In many ways, it’s now a way of life for our country. Being safe matters, and while the vast majority of our schools are very safe indeed, there are instances where parents are concerned.

In fact, the federal No Child Left Behind Act says that when states deem a school persistently dangerous, parents can transfer their child to a safer public school.

A free booklet from the United States Department of Education, Questions Parents Ask About Schools, tells what parents can do to ensure that their child’s school is safe and drug free. It recommends that parents:

- Review school discipline policies with your child. Make sure that she knows what behaviors you expect of her in school. Let her know that you will support teachers in their efforts to enforce the policies.
- Work with the school to develop a plan to handle safety and drug problems, such as drug education and violence prevention programs. Make sure the school has clear consequences for students who break school rules.
- Get to know your child’s friends and their parents. Make sure their attitude about drugs is compatible with yours. If not, encourage your child to find new friends.

Questions Parents Ask About Schools can be downloaded from the U.S. Department of Education Web site www.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/questions/questions.pdf, or ordered from ED Pubs, Education Publications Center, U.S. Department of Education, P.O. Box 1398, Jessup MD 20794-1398.

In other electronic resources, the

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory’s Safety Zone has published a free Safe and Secure series of eight guidebooks that can be downloaded at www.safetyzone.org/safesecure.htm or obtained on a free CD while supplies last. (Write: Newspaper Column, NWREL, 101 S.W. Main, Suite 500, Portland OR 97204.) Among some of the recommendations in Creating Schoolwide Prevention and Intervention Strategies, one of the eight guides, are those on schoolwide violence prevention, taken from the Surgeon General’s report on school violence. That report recommends:

- Establishing an “intolerant attitude toward deviance” by focusing on breaking up antisocial peer networks and changing the social context of the school
- Increasing “commitment to school” so that academic success is possible for all children and positive school climates are established
- Teaching and encouraging students to display the skills and behaviors that enable them to respond appropriately to events that may occasion and promote antisocial behavior.

The series gives educators, and others who are interested, a glimpse of how colleagues are addressing issues, overcoming obstacles, and attaining success in key areas of school safety.

This column by Karen Lytle Blaha is provided as a public service by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, a nonprofit institution working with schools and communities in Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington.

