

Fresh pasta nabs first-place community prize



Bob Soules talks to the judges as he mixes his pasta dough.

Partner

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The results of the competition were announced following the judges' demonstration.

Besides the audio-visual crew, representatives from WUOW Radio were at the cook-off to interview the hosts and judges. The radio station's website, wuow.com, features photos and interviews from the event.

In another new step for the cook-off, this year's contest included three categories. The Junior category was open to youths up to age 18 who are not yet in college. Three finalists were selected in this category, where previously only one Youth finalist was included in the cook-off.

The College category debuted this year, open to any

students attending college in the local area. Since only two entries were received in this category, the judges were instructed to consider them for inclusion, but were under no obligation to include them.

The College entry the judges selected was integrated into the Community category, which was open to any area resident older than 18 who is not a college student. Five Community finalists joined the College entrant for a total of nine finalists.

Photos in this section were taken by Daily Star photographer Julie Lewis. Stories in this section were written by Emily Popek. Cook-off recipes, stories, photos and video are available online at www.thedailystar.com.

Bob Soules didn't let a mistake get in his way during the 48th annual cook-off at the State University College at Oneonta. Ever cheerful and optimistic, Soules smiled his way through his complex recipe of Seafood Ravioli in Roasted Red Pepper Pasta to a first-place finish in the Community category, despite a misstep or two along the way.

Soules' recipe, which features homemade pasta dough flavored with red pepper, filled with a piquant blend of seafood, vegetables and herbs, and topped with a creamy cheese sauce, stood out among the 70-plus entries submitted for this year's contest.

"This is just a quick pasta," Soules said as he began combining his ingredients — "just flour, salt, egg and a little water," in addition to some olive oil and his main flavoring agent, roasted red pepper.

Soules said he had tried a number of different ingredients to add flavor to his homemade pasta, but found that roasted red pepper added the most punch of anything he had tried.

Asked about the genesis of his award-winning dish, he said it all began with the equipment.

"To tell you the truth, I got a new pasta maker, and I invited my mother and her husband over for dinner. He said, 'You should try a seafood ravioli,' so I started experimenting. This was my favorite of all the things I came up with." The judges seemed to agree with Soules.

"He is the best!," judge Joe Poon wrote on his score sheet. "Hard working, very organized. Great show."

Soules is passionate about homemade pasta, saying "there's really not much of a comparison" to the dried or frozen varieties available in grocery stores.

"Once you try the fresh kind, you won't want

to go back to that stuff you get in the store," Soules said, adding that he makes pasta often.

His practiced ease was clear as he rolled out sheets of pasta, illustrating his point that homemade pasta doesn't have to be beyond the reach of any home chef.

To make his case, Soules pointed out a few other features of the recipe that kept it from veering into gourmet-only territory.

The filling, for example, uses artificial crab meat instead of the real thing, which Soules called "cost-prohibitive." In addition, he modified the pasta ingredients slightly to make it more accessible.

"At home, I use half-semolina flour and half all-purpose, but today I used all-purpose so that more people would be able to replicate it at home," Soules said, pointing out that semolina flour can be hard to find in some supermarkets.

Once the dough was kneaded and rolled out to the desired thickness, Soules placed the flour-dusted sheet into a ravioli mold and began filling it carefully.

"I use a little egg wash to seal it up," Soules said; the proteins in the egg help bind the ravioli so they don't come open during cooking.

It was while making his sauce that Soules deviated from his recipe, omitting the flour from the alfredo-like creamy concoction. He confessed to his error, but the judges didn't seem to mind as they dug in to the colorful dish, which Soules served on a black-and-white platter garnished with bright rings of red and yellow bell peppers.

Soules' first-place finish gave him a prize package featuring \$200 in Hannaford gift cards, donated by the supermarket; a six-month subscription to The Daily Star; a \$50 gift certificate to The Tunnick Inn; and a 10-piece set of T-Fal cookware.

FIRST PLACE — COMMUNITY

SEAFOOD RAVIOLI IN ROASTED RED PEPPER PASTA

Bob Soules
Otego

Ingredients:

Pasta

2 cups flour
2 eggs
2 teaspoon olive oil
½ teaspoon salt
1 roasted red bell pepper
3 to 6 tablespoons water until dough forms

Filling

1 16-ounce package lobster- or crab-flavored meat or an 8-ounce package of each
3 to 5 spring onions chopped
¼ cup of diced bell pepper
3 tablespoons butter
1 egg yolk
1 teaspoon lemon juice
½ teaspoon tarragon
salt and pepper to taste

Sauce
1 pint half-and-half
⅓ cup grated Romano or

Parmesan

½ stick of butter
2 to 6 cloves of garlic (to taste)
1 teaspoon Italian seasoning
pepper to taste
1 to 2 tablespoons flour, or as needed

Directions:

Pasta

Mix all pasta ingredients together. Knead for 3 to 5 minutes. Cover with wax paper to keep it from drying out.

Seafood

Lightly fry onion and diced pepper in a little butter. Once cool, mix in seafood. Use the food processor and pulse until blended.

Boil water in a saucepan or double boiler. Once boiling, remove from heat.

Using a double boiler or metal bowl over the steam, whisk together the egg yolk and the lemon juice. Once it thickens, add butter a little at a time

until it is all melted in. Add tarragon, salt, pepper and any other spices. Stir constantly until thickened, about 5 minutes. Pour over seafood mixture and fold together.

Ravioli

Cut pasta in thirds. Roll out using a pasta roller or a rolling pin. Each ravioli should contain about 1 tablespoon of the seafood mixture. Seal edges with egg wash.

Cook in boiling water for about 5 minutes.

Sauce

Pour half-and-half in a saucepan on low. Add cheese, garlic and spices. Let it reach a light boil and add butter.

Once butter is incorporated, check flavor and consistency, and add any desired flavor enhancers. Add a little flour at a time to reach a desired thickness.

Spoon sauce over cooked ravioli and serve.