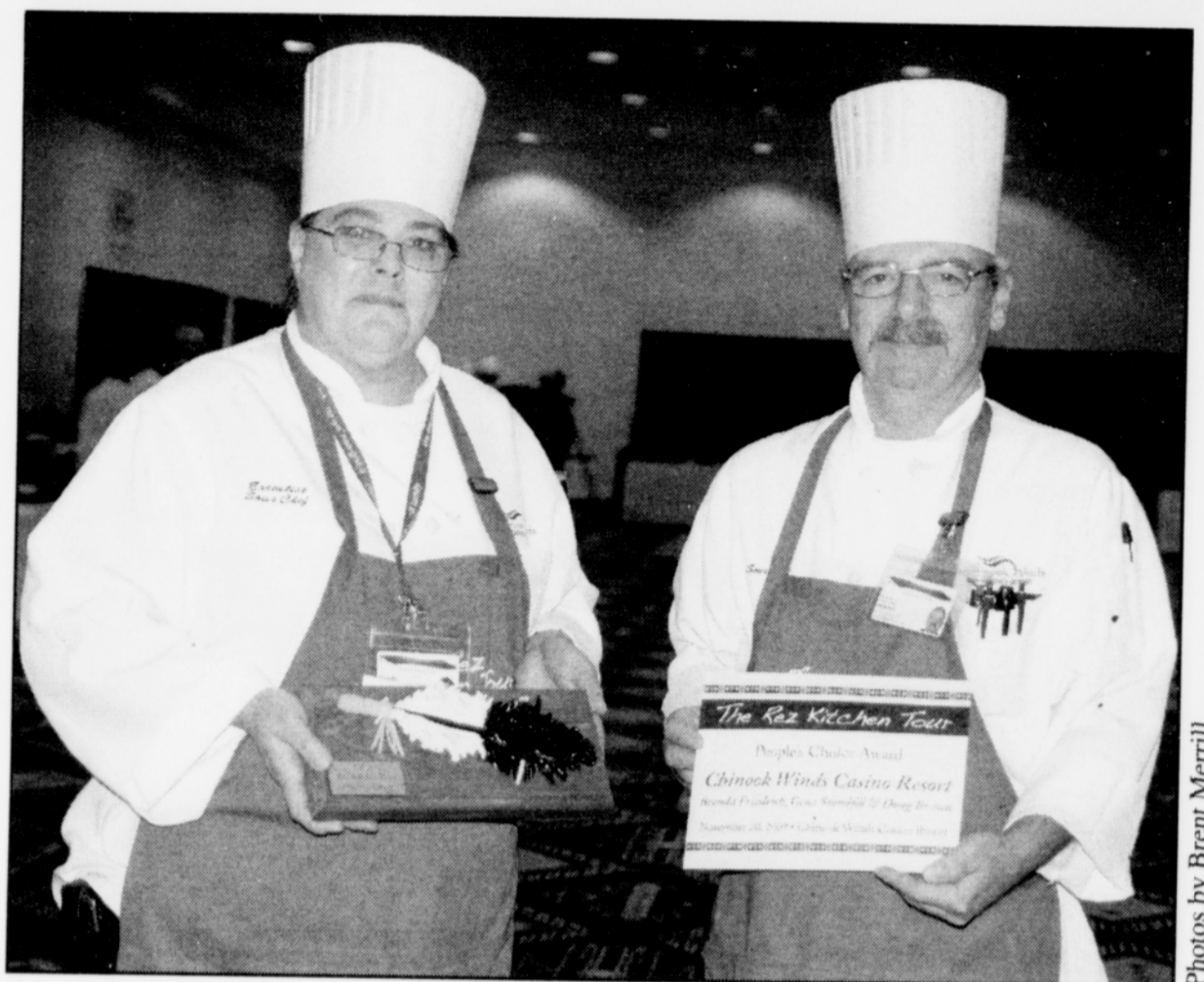


Demonstration – Tribal casino chefs from throughout the state of Oregon provide demonstrations throughout the day on Nov. 20 as part of the two-day inaugural Rez Kitchen Tour event held at Chinook Winds Casino Resort. The unique event showcased traditional American Indian cuisine.



Local Honors – The chef team from Chinook Winds is honored with the People's Choice Award at the first-ever Rez Kitchen Tour event. Pictured with the award are Brenda Friedrich and Geno Standfill.

Photos by Brent Merrill

First-Ever "Rez Kitchen Tour" Held at Chinook Winds Casino Resort Siletz Tribal member Chef Jack Strong highlights the event with demonstration, book signing

By Brent Merrill

The Rez Kitchen Tour – the inaugural showcase event for Native American-inspired cuisine held Nov. 19-20 – was deemed a huge success by all who attended. The public event (the first day's competition was a private event) featured top Tribal casino chefs from eight of the nine Oregon Tribes and was held from 10 a.m. through 3 p.m. at the Tribe's Chinook Winds Casino Resort in Lincoln City. The winners of the public competition were announced on the second day at 4 p.m.

The two-day event, which was a joint project among several groups, including the Oregon Tribal Tourism Working Group, provided visitors with an opportunity to try different prepared dishes inspired by thousands of years of tradition as the chefs lined up in stations next to each other in the casino's convention center – the site of the Siletz Tribes' 32nd Annual Restoration Pow-Wow celebration just five days earlier.

Guests wandered down the line of stations with tasting plates and others sat or stood at restaurant-style tables sampling the goods and discussing which was their favorites.

"I loved the squash soup," said event visitor Dennis Robinson of nearby Otis. "It was very good. I also really liked the crab and chanterelle mushrooms."

The soup recipe Robinson referred to was the butternut and acorn squash soup prepared by Chef Dan Catanio of The Mill Casino, which is owned and operated by the Coos, Siuslaw and Lower Umpqua Tribe of the southern Oregon coast.

Catanio is a graduate of The Culinary Institute of America in New York City and has 30 years experience as an executive chef. He has worked in hotels, country clubs and various restaurants throughout the United States – including the Waldorf Astoria in New York City and The Sardine Factory in Monterrey, Calif.

Lincoln City resident Jim Barney agreed with his friend Dennis Robinson

that the chanterelle mushrooms were "outstanding."

Barney said he was surprised.

"I didn't expect the mushrooms to be so good," said Barney.

The mushrooms and crab dish was prepared by Friday's first-place winning team from Spirit Mountain Casino, led by Raymond Nelson and Carl Hoover.

Nelson, a Grand Ronde Tribal member, is the lead cook at Spirit Mountain Casino's Cedar Plank Buffet in Grand Ronde. He received his associate's degree and Le Cordon Bleu certificate from Northwest Culinary Institute in Portland, Ore. He's worked in Las Vegas under Chef John Joho at the Eiffel Tower in Paris Casino and Chef Josh Thomsen at Vegas' Caesar's Palace.

Spirit Mountain Chef Carl Hoover is of Native descent from the people of Cahuilla and the Indian Canyons of Palm Springs. He has been showcased on the Food Network, the Travel Channel, Lifetime network, Showtime, NBC and KNBC's "Eye on L.A." He has been cooking for 32 years and spent 16 years as the executive chef at the Two Bunch Palms Spa Resort in Desert Hot Springs, Calif.

Spirit Mountain Casino had two teams at the event, which also was sponsored by the Grand Ronde Tribe's charitable arm – the Spirit Mountain Community Fund.

Spirit Mountain's second team took third place at the event and also won the special Indian Land Tenure Foundation's award for using traditional Native items in their recipes. Spirit Mountain II chefs were Jake Johnson and Manuel Diaz.

Johnson was born in Guam to a Navy family that inspired him to pursue a career in foods by making great dishes for him to try. He got his start in the field as a dishwasher at a country club and ended up attending The Culinary Institute of America in New York City, where he accomplished a bachelor's degree and his culinary degree.

Johnson got his start in Oregon at the world-famous Timberline Lodge before moving on to Reno, Nevada's Silver Club Casino. Johnson is currently the chef de cuisine at Spirit Mountain's Legends Restaurant.

Sous Chef Diaz is a Grand Ronde Tribal member who also works at Spirit Mountain's Legend's Restaurant. He started out washing dishes and throwing dough at age 14 in Arizona. He said his mother was his early inspiration to create good food and that led him to graduate from the Scottsdale Culinary Institute in 2001.

Diaz started his professional career at the Wyndham Peak's Resort in Telluride, Colo., and has now returned to his Tribal roots in Oregon and worked his way up to the position of sous chef at Legends.

Second place in the Rez Kitchen Tour event (in Indian Country, the word "rez" is an accepted Tribal member resident reference to an Indian reservation) was a tie between a team from Seven Feathers Casino Resort in Canyonville and a team from the Wildhorse Casino and Resort in Pendleton.

The Seven Feathers team was Alan Freeman, Brandy Stumpe and Lucas Shrock. The Wildhorse team was Brian von Eggers and Bruce Mecham.

Chef von Eggers is the chief executive chef at Wildhorse Resort and Casino and he started cooking as a young teen-ager. He graduated from Johnson and Wales Culinary Arts program and got his start in the business at the five-star Breakers Hotel in Palm Beach, Fla. He then worked in New York, Alaska, Death Valley, Mississippi and South Carolina before landing in Oregon at the Wildhorse, where he oversees all food and beverage operations for the Umatilla Tribe's casino operation.

Jim Barney's wife, Glenna, said her favorite dish was the dried elk and the Reservation Plum Wine Duck offering from the Klamath Tribe's Kla-Mo-Ya Casino team. The duck was a boneless, skin-on breast portion that had been marinated,

then seasoned before being pan-fried and sautéed before being sliced into thick pieces and served over a plum wine, orange and butter reduction sauce that featured cinnamon, garlic and shallots.

"I agree," said Gleneden Beach resident Joe Vincent, who said he heard about the event on the radio. "The duck was exceptional."

The Reservation Plum Wine Duck was prepared by the team of Klamath Tribal member Chef Briston Gilman. Gilman, who is of Klamath, Modoc and Yahooskin descent, was raised in Chiloquin on the Klamath Reservation. He has worked as a chef all over the state of Oregon, including at the Portland City Grill, Seven Feathers Casino, Crater Lake Lodge, Jake's Steak House and Rivers at the Avalon in Portland.

Chef Gilman graduated from Western Culinary Institute with chef honors, academic honors and top of the class status. He is a member of the American Chefs Association.

The Kla-Mo-Ya Casino team also offered a Sautéed Salmon with Northwest Berry Sauce that highlighted many of the sampling plates wandering up and down the line of chefs' demonstrations. The dish was a salt and pepper-seasoned salmon fillet sautéed (skin side down) in vegetable oil then plated and drizzled with their Northwest Berry Sauce.

The tasty sauce featured berries, white wine, white wine vinegar and heavy cream with fresh cracked black pepper and peppercorns.

Winners were announced by local Lincoln City radio personality Roger Robertson and the votes were counted by Dave Tovey's Siletz Tribal Business Corporation staff members and Siletz Tribal Council member and Rez Kitchen Tour Project Coordinator Tina Retasket. Tovey is a Umatilla Tribal member who has worked for the Siletz Tribe for the last two years.