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Thursday, September 22, 2011

Rivier students judge college chef competition

Michael Brindley

Lunch is usually pretty good in the dining hall at Rivier College, said senior Tajh Stokes. A slice of pizza, some fries, maybe a sandwich.

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Wednesday's lunch, however, was a little more upscale.

Chicken and cheese tortellini, Portuguese-style fresh Maine mussels with linguica, and pulled chipotle maple barbecue chicken on grilled Gorgonzola garlic bread were just a few of the dishes Stokes was in the process of devouring as he sat with a group of friends at a table in the Dion Center.

"I tried everything, honestly," Stokes said. "The mussels are amazing."

Stokes couldn't stop raving about the quality of the food he had been treated to as part of an event celebrating local food sponsored by Sodexo food services. The Localvore Culinary Challenge brought chefs from Rivier and eight other local colleges to the Nashua campus Wednesday to treat diners to dishes made from locally purchased food. The competition is meant to highlight local foods, but also the talents of the chefs working at the participating colleges, said Phil Harty, Sodexo district manager.

"We require all of our vendors to source locally first," Harty said, estimating that 20 percent of the food served at the colleges are local products.

Diners were asked to vote for their favorite meals as part of the competition, but the real winners Wednesday were the staff and students, many of whom came to the dining hall expecting to have another regular lunch, but were instead treated to all-they-could-eat gourmet dishes.


Pleasant aromas filled the room as the chefs cooked their dishes at tables set up along the wall.


The ingredients were listed for each dish, along with the local source. At the Plymouth State University table, chefs were preparing the pulled barbecue chicken sandwiches, which were being served with sides of warm fingerling potato salad and picked cucumbers. The free-



Staff photo by Bob Hammerstrom

Picking out the unfamiliar ingredients, from left, Emileigh Cenedella, Tajh Stokes and Lauren Saccoccio tried most of the entrees as chefs from eight colleges took part in a cooking challenge for students at Rivier College Wednesday, September 21, 2011. Students sampled and voted on their favorite entrees. All three are members of the school's volleyball teams.

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range chicken came from Misty Knolls Farm in New Haven, Vt., and the Gorgonzola came from Bogy Meadows Farm in Walpole.

“I wanted to make something that culled my favorite flavors together,” said Plymouth State executive chef Robin Campbell.

Sam Kazlas, a sophomore at Rivier from Pennsylvania, said it was nice to get a chance to taste some of the local cuisine.

“The chicken and scallop soup – that was bangin’,” he said.

Eric Blackburn, coordinator of student activities, sat down with a plate of fresh scallops being served by the chefs from Keene State College.

“They’re delicious,” Blackburn said. “Very good.”

Brian Links, head chef at Norwich University in Vermont, said he takes his job cooking for the students and staff at his college very seriously.

“The saying goes, ‘You’re only as good as your last meal,’” he said. “I live by that.”

Other colleges taking part were Daniel Webster College, Southern New Hampshire University, Colby-Sawyer College and Franklin Pierce University. Chefs were eager to please, as they served up their dishes.

“What do you think?” Rob Garcelon, executive chef at Norwich University, asked Rivier senior Maura Spencer as she finished the chicken scaloppini and roasted tomato and carrots with fresh cream, basil and fresh Vermont pasta served in a garlic bread bowl.

She gave Garcelon the thumbs up of approval. It was nice to get a break from her usual lunch, which is typically pasta and salad, she said.

“This changes it up a bit,” she said.

The Learning Curve appears Thursdays in The Telegraph. Michael Brindley can be reached at 594-6426 or mbrindley@nashuatelegraph.com.

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