

When chefs party, they do it in style

San Diego Dining

By David Rottenberg

When chefs party, it is quite a celebration. Think of the creativity, quality and attention that go into the preparation of dishes, as each participant tries to impress his peers.

Now ordinary diners can enjoy the benefits of these dedicated efforts at a series of charity dinners.

Chef Celebration (chefcelebration.org) is a collaborative effort by more than 50 award-winning local chefs who donate their talent, time and energy to raise money for a nonprofit culinary scholarship program. The organization offers the opportunity to working chefs to improve their skills dramatically by spending a week at the Culinary Institute of America (CIA) campus at Greystone in Napa Valley to attain the "master chef" designation.

Scholarships are made available to deserving chefs.

The professional kitchen is a team environment. Many well-known chefs received guidance and training from more experienced mentors, who taught them skills. The great ones grow from such beginnings to develop their own styles, adding to the knowledge and skill level of

the industry. The CIA is one of America's best-known institutions for turning out the great leaders of America's culinary scene.

Chef Celebration hosts a series of dinner in October, on every Tuesday of the month. Sequentially, the next dinners will be held at **Bernardo's** in Rancho Bernardo, **Pampelmousse Grille** in Del Mar, **Trattoria Acqua** in La Jolla and **Thee Bungalow** in Ocean Beach. At each location, a different team of five notable local chefs will prepare a special menu, complete with wine pairings.

Jeff Rossman has led Chef Celebration for a number of years. Rossman is a self-taught chef who has immensely grown in skill and reputation. His Hillcrest restaurant, Terra, is where the kick-off dinner was held.

The team was made up of Rossman, Chris Walsh of **Bite**, Joe Manganelli of **Laurel**, Colin Maclaggan of **Avenue 5** and Victor Jimenez of **Cowboy Star**. Except for Cowboy Star, which is downtown, all the other restaurants are also in Hillcrest.

Each chef prepared a dish, showcasing talent and creativity, and perhaps attracting diners to visit his restaurant in the future for a wider choice of dishes. Rossman and Walsh also prepared a

"dessert duet."

The dinner began with an "amuse" to clear the palate.

Rossman prepared a basil flan with curry oil. The flan, which had a custard-like texture, was delightfully creamy, suffused with the herb flavor.

The shallot rings topping the dish contrasted the softness of the flan with a slight crunch. The dish was paired with Ferrari-Carano Fume Blanc '07 that had a smooth tartness to further set off the creamy flan.

The third serving was Colin Maclaggan's dish, a duck confit and foie gras tortellini, which looked lovely and tasted better. The tortellini were like two white flowers that burst forth with flavor on the first bite. Brandy cherries dotted the plate, which added to the dark cherry taste of the wonderful Morgan Twelve Clone Pinot Noir to which the dish was paired.

Victor Jimenez offered the entrée, dry aged beef strip loin with oxtail ravioli.

The surface of the beef was well done, beautifully seasoned and crunchy. The rest of the beef was fairly rare.

The Justin Cabernet Sauvignon to which the dish was paired was mild and did not overwhelm the flavor of the dish.

Rossman's dessert, Quince Tart Tatin with butternut



Jeff Rossman

squash ice cream, had a kick to it. The ice cream had a strong ginger-like taste that was stimulating to the tongue, allowing it to taste the sweetness of the fruit with greater intensity.

The menus and chef teams at the remaining dinners will vary, but at each dinner, every chef will be working hard to please the group. It is a noble effort to achieve a noble goal.

Rottenberg is editor of Dining San Diego Magazine and member of the Southern California Restaurant Writers Association. Send comments to the editor@sddt.com. All letters are forwarded to the author and may be used as Letters to the Editor.

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