Dinner Belle: Taste of Trout Thrives at New Venue

BY JAKE ZIEGLER
STAFF WRITER

KALKASKA — Dan Bloomquist, Jodi Miller and the Trout Town Country Café have returned to their position atop the Taste of Trout mountain, winning both the Best in Show and People’s Choice awards last Wednesday.

Trout Town beat out Yankee Boy, Whitetails Steak N Ale, and the SEEDS After School group.

The winning concoction was a smoked steelhead and morel bisque with lake trout pate crostini.

“This is a great event,” Bloomquist said, “and we enjoy it whether or not we win. Winning is just the frosting on the cake.”

Bloomquist said they made extra bisque to sell at the restaurant, and ran out on Friday night.

Whitetails chef Jeff Saco offered three different flavors of rainbow trout: Cajun, curry, and parmesan.

Yankee Boy cook Jordan Willis created trout with an exotic rice mix, maple chestnuts, a cracker crumb crust, and a tart cherry glaze.

The non-profit SEEDS group, under the supervision of Melva Christunas and Kara Bontrager, presented “Trout-Tastical Tacos” with Trade East blackened marinated rainbow trout, homemade salsa and coleslaw.

The program provides after-school academic and cultural enrichment programs at select schools in northwest Michigan.

Kalkaska’s branch includes a Culinary Club, and they make new foods every week. “Everyone agreed on making trout tacos,” Christunas said, “and the kids were involved from beginning to end.”

Taste of Trout organizer Ken Waichunas praised SEEDS for doing a “fabulous job,” and added that “the kids are still on cloud nine” after winning the Most Creative Use of Trout award.

“Winning the award was very cool for the kids,” Christunas said.

The evening began with a special celebrity fish taste, featuring local celebrities such as Downtown Development Authority chairman Dean Farrier, Kalkaska County Sheriff David Israel, Trout King Dave Wolfe, and Miss Kalkaska Kaitlyn McCumby and her court.

This was the first Taste of Trout to take place at the Shady Belle in the abandoned police garage on Fourth Street.

“The venue was great,” Waichunas said. “There was a lot more room for people to sit and chat and enjoy the food.”

Shady Belle ably handled approximately 175 people that came out to sample the culinary delights.

The judges were Tim Tebeau and Todd Zawistowski from Traverse Magazine, and former New York City chef Andrew Hermann.

“I was particularly impressed with the SEEDS group,” Tebeau said. “It’s really important to teach kids about good food and healthy eating, so that was nice to see. It was really tough to pick a winner.”

Contact Jake Ziegler at jziegler@michigannewspapers.com.