



Bonita Unified

SCHOOL DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Bonita Unified Advanced Culinary Students Find the Recipe for Success

SAN DIMAS/LA VERNE – Chaparral-Vista High School Advanced Culinary students are making a name for themselves, pooling their talents and stretching their imaginations to create award-winning dishes under the guidance of hospitality instructor Ben Pando, who trained at the world-famous Le Cordon Bleu satellite campus in Pasadena.

Against a crowded field that saw entrants serving up time-honored family recipes, a team of five Chaparral-Vista culinary students shocked judges, contestants and chili lovers alike with a stunning first-place finish at the inaugural Bonita PTA Council Chili Cook-Off, held in September.

“We didn’t want to do a basic chili. We wanted it to stand out,” Pando said. “The chili was entirely the students’ creation. Some of them had never even had chili before, so we researched it and turned the class into a test kitchen. The students did everything, chop, peel, cook. All I did was stir the pot. It’s very rewarding to see our kids get the recognition they deserve. These students like to work.”

Starting from scratch, Chaparral-Vista students sourced ingredients not typically found in chili recipes, such as ground pork, chorizo, sweet potato, garbanzo beans and chipotle peppers, and garnished the chili with homemade touches like vegan sour cream with cashews, baked croutons made from Hawaiian bread, cotija cheese and pickled red onions. The result was a chili that found its way into the hearts of the Bonita PTA Council judges, garnering 23 of 25 first-place votes.

“The judges kept coming back to our chili. The pot was practically empty at the end of the judging,” said Chaparral-Vista senior Aidan Scalzi, who has seen his culinary skills proliferate since joining the class.

Scalzi, who is interested in exploring culinary arts as a career, is currently studying agriculture at the Pomona Fairplex CTE Center, which motivated him to create a ghost pepper raspberry jam that earned praise from Pando.

Chaparral-Vista senior Xavier Gonzalez had some interest in cooking prior to joining the class, but no experience.

“Chef Pando has really helped me grow my skills,” Gonzalez said. “I like grilling meat and I want to learn as much as I can about preparing it and plating it. Since joining this class I started working at a Mediterranean grill in Glendora and I am looking towards joining the culinary program at Mt. SAC after I graduate high school.”

The continuation high school has two culinary classes – basic and advanced, serving about 30 students. In the basic class students are introduced to concepts and techniques, learn proper food handling, plating, and knife skills, and taught how to prepare baked goods and desserts. The advanced class builds on these skills and includes recipe building, meal planning, catering, restaurant cooking simulations and creating signature dishes.

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Additionally, the culinary class regularly prepares meals for various campus functions, catering staff meetings and coordinating with Renaissance leadership students for special events like Red Ribbon Week and Student of the Month. At the end of the year, all the culinary students are invited to participate in a “Chopped”-style cooking competition, with the winner receiving a medal and a white chef’s coat.

“I am so proud of what Chef Pando and his students have been able to accomplish,” Chaparral-Vista principal Christine Black said. “The enthusiasm and experience Chef Pando brings into his classroom has made believers out of his students. His advanced students are a very confident group, and they realize that there is no limit to what they can create in their own kitchens. They are learning skills that could lead to lucrative career opportunities.”

PHOTO:

BUSD_CHAPARRAL_CULINARY: Chaparral-Vista High School Advanced Culinary Arts students shocked judges, contestants and chili lovers alike with a stunning first-place finish at the inaugural Bonita PTA Council Chili Cook-Off, held in September. Under the guidance of teacher Ben Pando, the students created their own recipe that included ground pork, chorizo, chipotle peppers, pickled red onions and homemade croutons.

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