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Monday Nov 19



Adria Murray / Daily News

Chef Matteo Ferrari, of Burlingame's Stella Alpina Osteria, excitedly accepts his third-place award in the Bay Area "Boss of the Sauce" competition on Nov. 11 at Saints Peter and Paul Church in San Francisco's North Beach.

Bay Area pasta lovers: 'Boss of the Sauce' crowned

By Adria Murray / Society Columnist

Who's the boss? "The Boss of the Sauce"? The king or queen officially crowned the top dog of pasta sauce in the Bay Area last weekend? (You'll have to read on to find out, my friends.)

On Nov. 11 at Saints Peter and Paul Church Event Center in San Francisco's historic North Beach, Italian cuisine restaurateurs came on a quest for the coveted title of "Boss of the Sauce" in a tomato-based sauce competition hosted by the FIERI organization.

For Italians Leo Rocco, international director of FIERI and originator of the sauce competition, and local FIERI chapter president Rob Della Santina, "The Boss of the Sauce" event serves as a vehicle for raising their culture's profile.

Of the event and organization's mission, Santina said, "We want to foster and grow Italian culture in the Bay Area, and 'Boss of the Sauce' helps us create awareness." Money raised at "Boss of the Sauce" will help fund cultural classes and events for FIERI's student and young professional members, with a portion of the proceeds also benefiting Saints Paul and Peter Church and the San Francisco Food Bank.

Serving up traditional ragu, cream-based and arrabiata (spicy) Italian sauces, the chefs stood by their simmering pots that afternoon and helped dish taste-testing portions for the general public and first-round judges. Seated at picnic benches with red-and-white checkered tablecloths as Italian mandolin music played, 300-plus patrons sampled the sauces and marked their votes based on criteria including appearance, taste and aroma.

Among the 29 entrants, five restaurants from the Peninsula were represented, including Divino of Belmont, Stella Alpina Osteria of Burlingame, Barolo of Pacifica, and It's Italia and Pasta Moon from Half Moon Bay.

Chef Matteo Ferrari of Stella Alpina served a slow-roasted pork and sweet bell pepper ragu,

while chefs Vincenzo Cucco of Divino and Betsy Del Fierro of It's Italia favored the use of red chili flakes in their sauces.

Along with Ferrari and Cucco, chef Nick Curtola of Pasta Moon made it into the semifinals with his tomato-cream-based sauce featuring porcini and chanterelle mushrooms and house made pancetta.

After much taste testing and a long period of waiting for results - during which the chefs broke out into spontaneous song singing "That's Amore" - the results from round one were announced. In addition to the above mentioned semifinalists, San Francisco restaurants that made it to the finals included Caesar's Italian Restaurant, Emmy's Spaghetti Shack, Lucca Delicatessen, Steps of Rome Trattoria and Zuppa.

Final round celebrity judges included KFOG DJs Renee Richardson and Annalisa Parziale, Gianmaria Mussio from the Istituto Italiano di Cultura, world champion pizza dough thrower Tony Gemignani, and chef instructor Marco Illaria from the California Culinary Academy, among others.

And the judges' critiques were harsh.

"Too sweet."

"I don't like the cream sauces."

"Keep it simple."

But despite the criticisms, the judges handed down praise, and awards, for the "pork-based sauces."

Third place was awarded to Ferrari of Stella Alpina, with second place going to Rich Azzolino of Caesar's, along with his cohorts, Luigi Romano and Mateo Crevello.

And the "Boss of the Sauce" title went to: (drum roll, please) ...

Joe Manzare of Zuppa, who was also the people's choice winner, along with Pasta Moon's Curtola. Manzare was thankful for the recognition, but paid the highest compliment to Azzolino by tipping his chef's hat to the second-place winner's sauce.

"I told him, 'I want to take a whole pot of your sauce home with me,'" said Manzare, before accepting his award.

Then came the hardest part of the day for this group of Italians - saying saluta.

"It takes 45 minutes to say goodbye," guest Aldo Mura said. "You don't want to forget anyone."

Adria Murray's society column appears every Sunday in the Daily News. Send event information to 324 High St., Palo Alto, CA 94301 or e-mail amurray@dailynews group.com.

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