

Michigan Pork Producers Association

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Contact: Mary Kelpinski

Chefs compete to create best original pork entrée

HOLT, Mich. — The average person walking in to a kitchen considers themselves a cook. Ian Ramirez considers himself an artist. That artistry helped him win \$1,000 and the title Superior Chef during the Michigan Pork Producers Association's (MPPA) 2010 Taste of Elegance. The annual, now in its 20th year, challenges chefs from throughout Michigan to create an original pork entrée that can be served up in restaurants or cooked at home. MPPA partnered with Cargill, featuring Sysco Corporation's premium White Marble Farms in providing pork for the competition.

Ramirez is the head chef at Brandywine Creek Whirlpool Performance Centre, an executive training facility tucked aside the Lake Michigan dunes near Covert. When he put his talents to the test on Feb. 11 at the Lansing Center, the judges called the unusual combination that made up his International Pork Trio, "a delicious treat of ingenuity."

"I like playing around with cheaper cuts of meat," Ramirez said. "The cheek, ear and shank are all great cuts that are underrated, and that's exactly why I wanted to promote them. They take a lot of time to cook, and most people aren't willing to put that kind of energy into it."

Ramirez's trio also won the People's Choice Award. It consisted of a French-style pork cheek confit with a fried pig's ear bird's nest; a Moroccan-inspired pork shank tajine with ras al hanout couscous; and an Asian-themed wasabi ponzu tempura battered pork rib with Asian vegetable slaw. All three were prepared for the first time during the competition.

"I entered the contest a long time ago, but I wasn't sure what I was going to make," said Ramirez, who is a second-year participant. "I came up with the idea three days before the competition, and tried it for the first time that evening. I was really confident in it and knew that it would work."

Scott Blackerby from Mission Point Restaurant on Mackinac Island was awarded Chef Par Excellence for his with North African Spiced White Marble Farms Pork Loin. David Daniot from The International Culinary School in Novi took home the title of Premium Chef with his Progressive Tasting of Suckling Pig.

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Ramirez will go on to compete against chefs from throughout the country for a \$5,000 grand prize and an all-expense-paid three-day cruise at the national Taste of Elegance, hosted by the National Pork Board, in Baltimore, Md., in June.

According to Mary Kelpinski, MPPA executive director, the program was created to encourage pork menuing in a creative and non-traditional manner. Chefs presented their entrees to a panel of four judges, who are looking for taste, appearance and originality.

“Pork is a versatile meat with many different applications,” she said. “But it is often underrepresented on restaurant and catering menus. This competition gives Michigan pork producers an opportunity get their product in front of more chefs and help them realize its potential.”

Other chefs who created original dishes for the evening were:

- Jeffery Langer from The Lansing Center in Lansing, with his Southern Pride of Fried Swine
- Ted Cizma from the Grand Traverse Resort and Spa in Acme with Slow Cooked White Marble Farms Karubi Pork Rib with Root Beer Glaze
- Cheyenne Galbraith from Lake Michigan College Mendel Center in Benton Harbor with Pork Vindaloo
- Matthew Bedra from Whole Foods Market in Ann Arbor with Pan-roasted Pork Tenderloin with Celeriac-Potato Gratin
- Mark Hobert from Extendicare Health and Rehabilitation Center in Taylor with Mardi Gras Pork Delight
- Eric Batten from The Gallery at Snyder Phillips, a residence hall at Michigan State University in East Lansing, with his Three Way Pork Chimichanga
- Robin Holmes from Pacinos Food and Spirits in Escanada with Carnita Tapas Trio
- Geoffrey Jones from the Great Lakes Culinary Institute, part of Northwestern Michigan College in Traverse City, with Swine-apple Cheesecake Salad
- Jake Robinson from the Pacific Rim in Ann Arbor with Pork San Sara
- Scott Swamba with SMS Catering in Howell with Asian-influenced Taste of Pork

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- Matt Wilson from The State Room at the Michigan State University Kellogg Center in East Lansing with Pork Sirloin Roast Stuffed with Pork Sausage

MPPA is a Holt-based commodity organization that administers producer-funded pork promotion, consumer information and research programs, and monitors public-policy activities affecting Michigan's 2,000 pork producers.

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