

Kansas City teen finds the recipe for success to become Best Teen Chef 2009

For Sammy Jo Claussen, a high school senior from Kansas City, keeping her cool in the kitchen today paid off, as she emerged as The International Culinary Schools at The Art Institutes "Best Teen Chef 2009". Sammy Jo won the Best Teen Chef Final Round Competition, sponsored by The International Culinary Schools at The Art Institutes, becoming the tenth teenager to lay claim to the title since the Competition's inception in 2000. The young and talented Sammy Jo earned a full-tuition scholarship to study Culinary Arts at The International Culinary School at The Art Institutes International - Kansas City, and the opportunity to serve as "Intern for a Day" in the Food Network Kitchens. The annual event was held this year at The Art Institute of Charlotte.

Kaitlyn McKissick of Olathe, Kan., earned second-place honors, receiving a half-tuition scholarship to study Culinary Arts at The International Culinary School at The Art Institute of Colorado. Oscar Melendez of Los Angeles earned third-place honors, receiving a quarter-tuition scholarship to study Culinary Arts at The International Culinary School at The Art Institute of California - Los Angeles.

Thirty-four high school seniors from across North America converged at The International Culinary School at The Art Institute of Charlotte to slice, dice, and simmer their way through the grueling two-hour competition in pursuit of more than \$200,000 in tuition scholarships and the title of Best Teen Chef 2009.

Competitors were given two hours to prepare three dishes from a southern-inspired menu of Curly Endive Salad with Bacon and Poached Egg; Oyster Stew; and Catfish with a Creative Garnish. The teens were judged on cleanliness, taste, presentation and more by the judging panel of culinary industry professionals.

Sammy Jo's grandmother helped develop her passion for cooking when she was just 12 years old; she particularly enjoys grilling fish and steak. Someday she hopes to open her own restaurant and travel the world to learn about all types of food.

"It is such an honor to be named the 2009 Best Teen Chef. I was thrilled when they announced my name; it made me feel that all my hard work and dedication truly paid off. I was among good company, as all my fellow competitors were extremely talented in their own right," said Sammy Jo.

Chef Michael Nenes, Assistant Vice President of Culinary Arts for The International Culinary Schools at The Art Institutes said, "Each year, this event becomes more competitive. The key to the Best Teen Chef Final Round Competition is to come with your game face on and be ready to out-cook the competition. Sammy Jo distinguished herself throughout the Competition. Her overall talent and the preparation of her catfish, in particular, really wowed the judges. The judges were very impressed with her focus under pressure and her exceptional culinary skills."