

Food & Drink



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Becky Alexander is on the hunt for the finest local produce

Celebrating the cream of our young chefs

One of my favourite local events is the Young Chef of the Year competition held in the professional training kitchen at Oaklands College. The competition is open to anyone in Years 9, 10 and 11 (which is age 13-16) and we always have fantastic entries from Herts, Beds and north London, showcasing the very high standard of cooking being taught in our schools.

While the college peacocks walked around the courtyard outside looking for crumbs, the young chefs cooked either a starter, main course or dessert.

Oaklands head chef Martin West and chef lecturer Mark Sharples and their team of students are on hand throughout the morning to help the teenagers use the equipment, as well as observe how well they work.

I am always impressed by how calmly the youngsters work when faced with industrial gas burners and huge ovens.

The teens make everything from scratch, including pastry, and there is usually something being made that I have never tried before (croquem-

bouche anyone?). It was lovely to see Alex Burnett, a former competitor in the Young Chef competition and now a student at Oaklands, in his chef whites, on hand to help the youngsters.

Judging this year were Nick McGeown, group head chef of Lussmanns, Martin West, myself, and St Albans Deputy Mayor Cllr Gill Clark. We enjoyed tasting every dish and awarded marks for technical skills, presentation and flavour. We awarded two runners up this year, and one overall winner.

We had a tough choice in the starters and main courses. We really liked Stephanie Attipa's homemade tricolour pasta, and I could have happily eaten the whole of Lily Beth McNally's lasagne for lunch.

Our runner up in this section was Florence Turtania from The Priory School, for her sophisticated smoked haddock and poached egg on bacon and leek mash. Florence was also a runner up last year for her tasty fishcakes. The haddock and egg were cooked perfectly, and arrived at the judging table in perfect condition, showing good timing, which is a challenge of this competition.

We had a lot of desserts to choose



■ Runner-up Florence Turtania with winner Rebekah McLaren and judges at Oaklands

from this year, with a special mention for some outstanding sugar work. We particularly liked Maisie Cripps' fondant flowers and Jasmine Mounir's homemade honeycomb. Elle Ward's chocolate tart with meringue was delicious too, and looked beautiful. Our runner up was Raziya Nadeem from Denbigh High School who impressed the professional chefs with her chocolate soufflé with raspberry sauce. Again,

Raziya timed her dish well, meaning the soufflé arrived with us in perfect condition.

The judges were unanimous in awarding overall winner of the competition to Rebekah McLaren for her delicious tomato broth with home-made pesto bread. Rebekah served the broth in a tea pot with matching cups, and made the pesto and bread from scratch in the short time allocated.

All the Young Chef finalists were presented with certificates from The Deputy Mayor of St Albans. The three winners also won Amazon vouchers and vouchers to eat at Lussmanns.

Winner Rebekah also won work experience at Lussmanns and Oaklands, and a fab trophy to take home. Her name will also go on a trophy to be kept at Oaklands, along with all future winners.

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