

Chef Timothy Harris wows New Orleans with Lebanon seafood dish

Chef Timothy Harris represented Pennsylvania at seafood competition

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While Hershey's cocoa nibs and rainbow trout from the Limestone Springs Fishing Preserve in Richland may be two of the Lebanon area's distinct menu contributions, few would think of a dish featuring both ingredients.

But that is just the place Chef Timothy Harris's culinary mind led him as he prepared to compete in the 11th annual Great American Seafood Cook-Off in New Orleans, presented by the Louisiana Seafood Promotion & Marketing Board on Aug. 2.

"When I pulled all the ingredients together in the first round, it was extremely experimental," said Harris, a career services specialist and instructor at the Pennsylvania School of Culinary Arts at YTI Career Institute in Lancaster.

When Harris, a Palmyra resident, was invited to participate in the competition, he was admittedly unsure of what he would bring to the table, considering he would represent the landlocked state of Pennsylvania against seventeen chefs from across the country, including a number from the seafood-heavy Gulf States.

"I had made some calls on the definition of seafood," said Harris.

He explained that "the dish had to best represent the state of Pennsylvania" and use "something indigenous." With this in mind, Harris decided to pick two foods that he felt achieved that goal- Hershey Cocoa and rainbow trout from Limestone Springs.

"The dish really evolved with those key ingredients. I didn't do more, I didn't cut back," said Harris. "The plate told a story."

Cocoa nibs, as Harris explained, are not the same as a chocolate bar. The nibs are the starting ingredient for chocolate, but are not at all sweet. The sweetness of chocolate comes from the sugar and other ingredients added later on, while the cocoa dust itself has a bitter taste.

For his recipe, Harris ground the nibs into a powder and then used the powder as a type of coating on the trout for contrast.

The cocoa dust also added a crust to the fish, giving a texture to the skinned fish.



Chef Harris, of Palmyra, preparing his dish Saturday, Aug. 2 at the Great American Seafood Cook-Off in New Orleans. The dish consisted of ingredients from the Lebanon area. YTI Lancaster

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Additional ingredients included corn, tomatoes, butter from a Lancaster farm, and peaches from Adams County.

"It was a plate that had a lot of components, more so than the others," said Harris.

In addition to the cocoa trout, the chef concocted a potato cake with smoked trout. He then baked the skin of the fish to create a crisp, similar to a potato chip.

Harris had only an hour to cook and plate the dishes, which he had to use wisely.

"I had four seconds to spare. It was a little freaky towards the end," said Harris.

The judges were impressed by both the unique mix of ingredients and the complexity of the plate, he explained, and though he did not place, Harris was happy to have the opportunity and the judge's acclaim.



Palmyra resident Chef Harris' cocoa trout dish at the Great American Seafood Cook-Off in New Orleans, held Saturday, Aug. 2. Harris' recipe includes Hershey cocoa nibs and rainbow trout from Limestone Springs Fishing Preserve. YTI Lancaster

working at a family business.

"My aunt and uncle had a tavern in town, and my job was to clean," he said.

Throughout high school, the chef continued working in the industry and pursuing an interest in the arts, which he claimed has helped him visualize his dishes.

"I had an artistic eye, and I carried that into culinary school," Harris said.

He began working at the Pennsylvania School of Culinary Arts about six and a half years ago.

Harris is married to Chef Cher Harris of the Hotel Hershey, who has been making headlines with her competition winning pastries and dessert showpieces. It has been years, however since the two have competed against each other.

"In the earlier days, we would have our showdowns," Harris recalled.

For Harris, it had been over 12 years since his last competition. He saw the Great American Seafood Cook-Off as a welcome return to form.

"The competition recharged who I am, what I do and what I believe in," he said.

While Harris stated that he is "definitely the type of person who will swing from the hip" at a competition, he also stressed what it takes to get to compete at a national level.

"It's a passion, and you work hard and practice, practice, practice," said Harris.

The chef was one of the only who competed solo, without a sous chef. He was also one of the few who were not heads of their own restaurant.

"I was the only one there as an educator, and honestly probably one of the oldest," said Harris.

He hopes that this type of competition can be both an inspiration to his students and a way for teachers to better reach their students.

"When they see you do it, it puts solid ground out there. They see that we travel the same road that they do," Harris said.

And while he has not yet found another competition, the chef is eagerly awaiting another chance to show off his culinary strength.

"After this experience, I'm looking for a new competition," Harris said.

"That's a good feeling. It doesn't always have to be about first place. I definitely made a good show for myself and to represent this area," Harris said.

The competition was a bit of a swap meet for the chefs as well.

"It was nice to be able to watch what they do as well," said Harris, who professed to having "walked away with 17 new friends."

"Even though it was a competition, everybody was there to help each other," he said. "There was really not a bad plate. The competition was dynamic and over the top."

Harris began in the industry at a young age,



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