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FOOD

Sweet surprise: Hicksville is home to one of the best puddings in the nation **B12**



COOL 2KNOW

Signs of the times: Celebs make the two-finger salute cool again **B2**

Newsday part 2

EVENING OF GOOD TASTE

LI chefs go dish-to-dish

BY ERICA MARCUS
STAFF WRITER

No extra points for simplicity here. Michael Merida of Pine Hollow Country Club in East Norwich was a big winner at last Monday's Evening of Good Taste with his sprawling dessert — a warm chocolate mousse tart accompanied by a spoonful of butterscotch timbale and white peach gelee, a pony glass filled with hot chocolate martini and gianduja pops, and a reduction of 25-year-old balsamic vinegar and Coca-Cola.

Merida's creation was named best restaurant dessert at the event; he also was awarded the prize for best overall table presentation, and the Long Island chapter of the American Culinary Federation bestowed on him its medal for restaurant excellence.

The ACF medal for bakery excellence went to Wendy Israel and Angel Elon of Baking by Design in Queens, who also won best bakery bread, for their chocolate challah, and best bakery Viennoise (puff-pastry) for their guava-almond Danish.

The event, now in its 13th year, is a culinary extravaganza to benefit South Nassau Communities Hospital. More than 80 restaurants, bakeries and wineries set up white-tableclothed tables at Crest Hollow Country Club in Woodbury to share their specialties with 2,000 guests, each of whom paid at least \$75. The evening netted the hospital nearly \$180,000.

In the hours before the general noshing began, a team of culinary experts judged the participants. Besides Pine Hollow's two wins in the restaurant category, top honors in appetizers went to Butterfield's in Hauppauge for chef Jerry Suppa's cabernet-braised short ribs with pan-toasted gnocchi. Best entree went to The Bridge in West Islip for chef John Montgomery's veal short-rib-stuffed calamari with celeriac cake and lobster-foie gras ravioli.

In the bakery category, the best pastry prize went to Rob Fishman of Sweet Karma's in East Meadow. Christina DeLustro and Michael Fallon, chefs-owners of Christina Michaels Desserts in Nesconset, won best decorated cake.



Pine Hollow's Michael Merida was a winner at the fundraiser.