

Teen cooking up a storm on televised competition

DA COSTA, Irelyn

By Chris Clay

cclay@mississauga.net

MN December 24, 2015

Chocolate Aleppo pepper cookies with kiwano melon puree - it sounds like a dessert one could find on the menu of a high-end restaurant.

What it is, however, is the dish Port Credit teen Irelyn daCosta whipped up while under the intense pressure of cooking for \$20,000 as part of *Chopped Canada's* televised Teen Tournament competition. Sixteen teens from across Canada, including daCosta, are vying to be named the winner and claim the grand prize using all their best cooking tips and tricks.

The Mississauga girl, who's just 13 and a Grade 8 student, won her episode, which aired on Food Network Canada earlier this month. With the win, she advanced to the finale, which will air on Boxing Day.

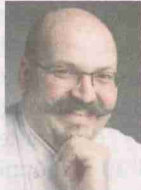
Asked about the best dish she cooked during the episode, which also included a King Crab salad with blushed butter oak lettuce appetizer and a Dijon-crusting goat

chop with garlic fingerling potatoes entrée, daCosta said it was the cookie. Desserts are a bit of specialty for her, she said, and daCosta was particularly pleased with how the cookie turned out considering she had never baked with some of the ingredients, including the Aleppo pepper.

She was undaunted, despite her inexperience with the exotic ingredients, and daCosta dove headlong into the dish and came out with something that tasted divine according to the judges. She said when using an ingredient you aren't familiar with, the secret is to taste, taste and taste some more. Plus, be willing to try new things and be creative.

Taking part in the competition isn't exactly a relaxed day of cooking in the kitchen, considering contestants have just 30 minutes to make each dish and are required to use all the ingredients that are provided.

Standing before the judges, including the highly respected Massimo Capra, and getting feedback on her cooking was rather helpful.



Massimo Capra

"It was a really great experience," said daCosta. "It was great to get advice from them and now I'll know what to do next time."

A love of cooking started at a young age for daCosta. She remembers being about five making her first ever dish, a banana chocolate chip muffin, with her mom, Karen, and really loving the whole experience.

The challenge of cooking for daCosta, and what she enjoys about it, is that you can always learn a new technique or way to prepare a dish. It's a constant evolution of style and ability and one she embraces, she said.

Regardless of the result of the Boxing Day finale, daCosta says the show has been a massive boost to her cooking confidence.

"I was really, really excited (when I won my episode)," said daCosta. "Even if I had went home after the dessert round, I would have been so proud of myself."

The youngster envisions a day somewhere in the future when she's running her own restaurant.

Past episodes of the Teen Tournament can be seen by visiting foodnetwork.ca.



Port Credit's Irelyn daCosta has advanced to the finals in the *Chopped Canada Teen Tournament* competition, which airs on Boxing Day. Photo by Alex Urosevic