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Isabella's Takes Top Prize in The West Coast Chowder Competition while other Awards Head North.

On June 11th, 2011 The West Coast Chowder Competition joined The Monterey Wine Festival for a day of exceptional chowders, great wines, spirits, beers, entertainment and more. The much anticipated West Coast Chowder Competition kicked off at Noon with 20 professional chefs entering as many as three chowders each into three categories. Clam Chowder, Seafood Chowder and Creative Chowder allowed for a wide variety of interpretations and recipes. Only professional chefs were allowed to compete and only from the West Coast. Chefs came from as far away as Seattle, Washington and San Diego to see if they could capture the top Copper Pot awards and place within the various categories. The Copper Pot Award goes to The Best of Show and the People's Choice Award each year and is handed around to the next winner much like the Stanley Cup of Hockey.

The competition was fierce with scoring based on Appearance, Flavor, Texture and for the Creative Category actual creativity of the chowder ingredients. Judges split into groups to find the top in each category and then tasted the top from each to find Best of Show.

Isabella's Restaurant, owned by Tene Shake, claimed victory this year with his Creative Chowder of sweet crab, corn and jalapeño's. It won 1st place in the creative category as well as top prize Best of Show. Additionally, another Shake restaurant The Fish Hopper took top place in the Seafood Category. Overall each of the Shake family restaurants have received top awards in the first two years of The West Coast Chowder Competition and they want to continue that tradition next year too. "It's fun to compete and be out with all the other restaurants and it definitely keeps us all on our toes, when it's all said and done receiving top honors is really exciting and keeps us in suspense, we never take anything for granted. I never imagined I might win this year," said Tene Shake, "We're walking on cloud nine."

Of the other restaurants who share the 1st place spotlight they too were all smiles. Willie Franz of Characters in The Marriott Hotel won in the Clam Chowder category, a very coveted moniker, while Lou Lou's Griddle in the Middle took 2nd in the category and 3rd went to Chef Ressel Rassallat of Club XIX, Pebble Beach fame. In the Seafood Category Flaherty's and Sam's Chowder House took 2nd and 3rd. For the 2nd and 3rd place in the Creative Category Domenico's on the Wharf and Duke's Chowder House received honors.

The People's Choice Award sees the pot move north to Seattle where Larry Mellum of Pike Place Chowder will give it a home for the next year or maybe more.... "We are thrilled to have won the People's Choice Award, thank you, thank you, thank you. We are very proud of the chowders we serve so to have that acknowledged by the attendees is great news. We love the people who came to the event in Monterey we had a great time. So, thank you to the Monterey Wine Festival and the sponsors for putting on this event. In Seattle we are often compared to the restaurants of Monterey by visitors to Pike Place Market so expanding this event to include any and all of us on the West coast was brilliant. Thank you."

"What makes this competition so interesting is the fact that all of these professional chefs have pretty much proven themselves where they are at so on any given day any of them might win or you could have an upset too like in the case of Chef Benito winning second in Clam Chowder from Lou Lou's Griddle in the Middle, it only goes to show that even the little guy can win. No one can ever predict the results of competitions like this, we simply have to wait to see what happens. The way we have it set up the judges have no idea whose chowder they are judging and that alone allows the chowders to speak for themselves. With this competition you might have the best chowder, but if the appearance you've given it isn't up to par with a nice bowl or some type of embellishment you can lose the whole thing. It's a nail biter!" said Chris Cannard, director of the competition. "We're already looking forward to next year's entries."

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