

FACING PAGE: And the winner is... Jonathan Grant © Art Institute - Las Vegas

JOYCE GORSUCH

TOP TEEN CHEF LAS VEGAS SERVES UP A WINNER

SEVENTEEN-YEAR-OLD JONATHAN GRANT, A RECENT GRADUATE OF CORONADO HIGH SCHOOL, REMEMBERS THE TWENTY MINUTES THAT HELPED LAUNCH HIS CAREER.

It's April, during the Art Institute Best Teen Chef Local Cook-off Competition. The high school senior watches as the white wine for his sauce goes up in flames. "The food is being plated for presentation to the judges, and I ruin my sauce," says Grant.

He needs to change his menu on the fly. "A light bulb goes off in my head," says Grant. From his remaining ingredients he makes sauce Espagnole, creating a paste of red wine, jalapeños, garlic and onions.

Now it's June, and Grant believes that his improvised sauce has opened several doors beginning with a first-place win statewide and a sixth-place showing nationally in the Art Institute Teen Chef competitions.

"If I hadn't made that sauce, I probably wouldn't have won first place in Nevada," he says.

In the process of beating out nine other contestants in the Nevada competition and placing sixth among 31 national contestants, Grant has begun making a name for himself in the largest private-sector industry in the U.S. In 2007 the food service industry employed 12.8 million people nationwide of whom more than 100,000 were chefs and head cooks.

Those numbers are increasing. Between 2006 and 2016 analysts expect U.S. eateries to hire an additional 8,700 chefs and head cooks, according to the web site for the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (bls.gov).

Closer to the home kitchen, the Las Vegas metro area employs about 2,270 chefs and head cooks and by 2014 will hire about 80 more, an increase of 3.7 percent, according to the web site for the Nevada Department of Employment, Training and Rehabilitation (nevadaworkforce.com).





THIS PAGE: Teen chefs in the kitchen ©Art Institute - Las Vegas

Demand for skills creates demand for training. If the number of local culinary instruction programs is any indication, educators expect brisk business for organizations that teach high-level food preparation skills.

In the Las Vegas metro area, future chefs have a choice of at least five programs—the Art Institute's International Culinary School; College of Southern Nevada's School of Business, Hospitality and Public Services; Le Cordon Bleu's Culinary School; the National Restaurant Association Educational Foundation's Pro Start High School Program and UNLV's Hospitality Program.

Size seems to help. Anne Dean, director of public relations for the Art Institute-Las Vegas in Henderson, says that the Art Institute provides essential resources for future culinarians in the form of professional-grade kitchen space and contact with respected chefs. As the largest system of culinary schools in North America, "we have the resources to encourage up-and-coming culinary talent in innovative ways," says Dean.

For instance, since 2000 the school has organized Best Teen Chef Local

Cook-offs in more than 30 locations in Canada and the U.S. Dean says that high school seniors pay nothing to apply and compete.

The top three winners of the national contest receive full-tuition scholarships worth more than \$40,000 each to attend the Art Institute locations of their choice. Fourth- to sixth-place contestants receive half-tuition scholarships. Seventh- to ninth-place contestants receive one-quarter-tuition scholarships.

In May of this year, the Art Institute-Las Vegas campus had its turn hosting the national Teen Chef Cook-off and also partnered with *Bon Appetit* magazine. The Teen Chef contest coincided with two Vegas-based events for *Bon Appetit*—Vegas Uncork'd and an online social-networking preview of *Bon Appetit*'s national relaunch.

Additionally, this year for the first time the Art Institute partnered with the Food Network. National winner Jonathan Miller of Savannah will receive the full Art Institute scholarship of about \$62,000 and will also be "Intern for a Day" at the Food Network Kitchens in New York. He will receive a tour of the Food Network Studios, dinner for two

at a Food Network chef's restaurant and a library of Food Network Kitchens cookbooks.

The increasing popularity of Las Vegas as a gastronomic destination is helpful in attracting these media partnerships, says Chef David Henriksen, academic director of culinary arts at the Art Institute-Las Vegas. Our town is "considered one of the culinary capitals of the world," he says. "You can find every cuisine here."

But in order to earn prestige and media exposure, says Henriksen, chefs need to remember that food preparation is a high-volume business. Reliability trumps flashiness. "It's like sports—teamwork, timing and success," he adds.

A chef who constantly practices can deliver consistency and teamwork, often under intense pressure, says Henriksen. "A chef with finesse can have the first and last dishes of the night come out looking the same."

Local Teen Chef winner Grant, who has been practicing nearly his entire life, agrees. Over the years his brother DJ has taught him how to grill, his mother Debra has taught him how to prepare big holiday meals and his father Jeffrey has shared stories about his job as an executive chef in Southern California.

In addition to his experiences in the home kitchen, for the past two years Grant has represented Coronado High School in team culinary contests organized by Pro Start, a national after-school program.

During the Art Institute Teen Chef competitions, Grant realized that his Pro Start experience gave him an advantage. "About 90 percent of the people in the Teen Chef competition had not competed before," he says.

Grant also practiced on his own, daily, during the two and a half months prior to the Art Institute competition. And he attended classes in Art Institute training kitchens, learning from chef instructors Jean Noel-Derval and Larry Baumann.

Grant says he especially enjoyed learning from Chef Noel-Derval. "He is very traditional," he says. "Certain dishes you just don't change."

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Noel-Derval and Baumann showed Grant how to turn artichokes and how to master the three competition criteria—knife skills, kitchen safety and organization, and food presentation.

Post-competition, Grant marvels at how his life has changed.

After Grant won a \$31,000 scholarship from the Art Institute, the Epicurean Charitable Foundation, a Las Vegas-based nonprofit, awarded him a mentor—David McIntyre, vice president of food and beverage at MGM Mirage—and a \$40,000 scholarship.

To win the Epicurean scholarship Grant wrote essays and bought a suit to wear to interviews. His success in April didn't hurt either. "I'm sure that the Teen Chef win helped me get the Epicurean scholarship," he says.

So did his grades—five As and one B. "My mom was right," says Grant. "Believe you can win, and it'll happen."

His older brother helped too, "kicking his butt" to attend school and focus on cooking. "We didn't always live on the best side of town," says Grant. "Cooking kept me indoors and out of trouble."

Looking ahead, Grant plans to earn a bachelor's degree in culinary arts from the Art Institute, study abroad, get an internship, and ultimately have a career on the Strip. "I'd love to work on the Strip," he says.

Now a former Teen Chef Cook-off contestant, Grant already has learned several lessons. "Now I know, I'm going to be a student for the rest of my life," he says. "Also, it's important to trust yourself. The way to become great is to be original."

Of course, all that practice helps too.