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Pillsbury finalists miss out on prize dough

Central New York is home to three women at the grand champ of cooking contests.

Wednesday, June 30, 2004

By Margaret McCormick
Food editor

Madeleine Bergquist, of Camillus, knew her recipe for Fiesta Dip was good when she brought it to a family party four years ago and promptly went in the kitchen to make another batch.

"They ate it up," she recalls.

So did judges for the 41st edition of the Pillsbury Bake-Off, sponsored by General Mills.

Earlier this year, Bergquist, 47, entered a "jazzed-up" version of her microwave bean dip in the fast snacks and appetizers category of America's premier cooking contest.

To the mix of refried beans, green chiles and shredded cheese, she added black beans, a sprinkling of frozen corn and some bits of smoky bacon. She renamed the dish Bean and Bacon Fiesta Dip.

Out of literally tens of thousands of entries (cooks can enter as many recipes as they like), the judges deemed it a winner - or at least one of 100 finalists.

The finalists crossed their fingers Tuesday as Suzanne Conrad, of Findlay, Ohio, was named the Grand Prize-winner for her entry, Oats 'n Honey Granola Pie. She takes home \$1 million, and about \$10,000 worth of kitchen appliances. Three other recipe category winners receive \$10,000 each.

It is rare for an area, such as Central New York, to be home to three finalists, says Marlene Johnson, a spokeswoman for the bake-off. Three states, New York, California and Illinois, each count seven finalists at the event this year. Some states have none, she adds.

On Saturday, Bergquist and two other finalists from Central New York, Wendy Osborne, of Onondaga Hill, and Brandy Koproski, of Oswego, flew to Hollywood to participate in the bake-off, which is held every two years.

Monday, they donned aprons and stepped into their individual mini kitchens at the Renaissance Hollywood Hotel to prepare their recipes once more for

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judging. Recipes must use at least one Pillsbury dough or select General Mills product.

They are judged based on taste, appearance, creativity and consumer appeal.

Berquist, Osborne and Koproski met on several occasions before the event, and last week, as they made some local radio and TV appearances to talk about the bake-off, their excitement was heating up.

Koproski's Antipasto Appetizer Pizza and Osborne's Spicy Shrimp Pot Stickers were entered in the same recipe category, "Weekends Made Special."

Koproski, 30, grew up eating Italian food. She says she "took all the things I love about antipasto and put it on a pizza." That includes salami, provolone cheese, feta cheese, marinated artichokes and more. Her recipe uses refrigerated pizza crust.

Osborne, 48, got the inspiration for her shrimp-filled pockets while eating Chinese food with her family one night, and came up with a dish that uses refrigerated biscuits instead of won-ton wrappers. They're baked and served with dipping sauce.

"I made them a couple of times with different dipping sauces and brought them in to my co-workers and my husband's co-workers," says Osborne, assistant director of publications and design for the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry. "I called them my test kitchen."


Bake-off spokeswoman Paula Mielke says Osborne "fell to her knees" in excitement when she called to tell her she was a finalist.

Osborne says the whole experience has left her walking on cloud nine.

"The amazing thing is that your recipe got picked from thousands across the country," Osborne said last week. "Just going there and baking is such a thrill."

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