

WELSH CULINARY ASSOCIATION

NEW WELSH CHEFS EVENT DECLARED A SUCCESS

The first Welsh Chefs Conference has been declared a success after attracting chefs, exhibitors and students from across Wales to Glamorgan Cricket's SWALEC Stadium in Cardiff on November 19 and 20.

The conference and associated exhibition, organised by the Welsh Culinary Association, were sponsored by the Welsh Assembly Government to promote the food and drink industry brand 'True Taste', Hybu Cig Cymru/ Meat Promotion Wales, the Applied Ability Awards, Skills Competition Wales and Tourism Training for Wales.

The first day of the event was set aside for competitions, with the showpiece Young Welsh Chef of the Year contest being won by Joseph Jones, 22-year-old chef de partie at The Great House Hotel, Bridgend.

Jones, making his competition debut, held off a strong challenge from fellow gold medallist Tom Middleton from Hotel Maes y Neuadd, Talsarnau, Harlech and the other four finalists. Johnathon Goodman from Ruthin Castle, Ruthin and David Szanto from The Chandlery Restaurant, Newport each won silver medals and Phil Clarke from the Armless Dragon Restaurant, Cardiff and Andrew Sheridan from The Groes Inn Hotel, Conwy each collected bronze medals.

The medals were presented by Deputy Minister for Skills John Griffiths who praised the Welsh Culinary Association for contributing to the Welsh Assembly Government's drive to improve the country's skills and economic strength.

"These young chefs are going to be the star chefs of the future and it's a real pleasure for me to be involved in recognising and rewarding such talent," he said.

He urged employers to continue investing in training despite the economic downturn and pledged Assembly Government support. "History has shown that countries that continue to upskill are the ones that prosper when the economic upturn comes," he added.

He welcomed the introduction of new Applied Ability Awards (Triple A) to train chefs in Wales and said the Skills Competition Wales was an integral part of the Assembly's 'Skills that Work for Wales' strategy.

The conference promoted the new Triple A training programme in Wales that aims to improve standards in the nation's hospitality industry and provide national benchmarks that define and develop craft skills. The awards are designed to raise the skills of learner chefs through on-the-job training and mentorship followed by a practical exam.

Scott Anthony, British Food Trust director, encouraged employers to use the programme to grow their own chefs to fight the recession.

Main focus of the second day of the conference was a series of demonstrations. 'Garden to Plate' was the topic chosen by executive chef Michael Bates and head gardener David Butt from Hurst House, Laugharne, before Gareth Johns, chef proprietor of the Wynnstay Hotel, Machynlleth, focused on slow food and what that meant in practice.

Chef Nick Davies from Cambrian Training Company, Welshpool and Gareth Evans, general manager of Celtic Pride Beef, gave a demonstration on modern forequarter beef butchery cuts before Colin Gray, of Capital Cuisine, Cardiff and Bates took part in a Ready Steady Cook contest with two members of the audience.

In the Skills Competition Wales, the Waggon and Horses restaurant and pub in Newtown completed a notable double, as chef proprietor Neil Roberts won the advanced contest with a gold medal and his junior chef, Matthew Smith, won the intermediate title with a silver medal.

Other competition winners were: Static classes: open restaurant plates - dessert, Michael Coggan, Ystrad Mynach College, silver; open restaurant plates - main course, Andrew Clash, Ystrad Mynach College, bronze. Junior Skills Welsh Lamb, Charlotte Thomas, Ystrad Mynach College, gold.

"The conference has given us a good foundation on which to build for the future and we are committed to repeating the event next year," said Arwyn Watkins, one of the organisers from the Welsh Culinary Association.



Speakers: Speakers and demonstrators at the Welsh Chefs Conference Michael Bates, Arwyn Watkins, Scott Anthony, Deputy Minister for Skills John Griffiths, Nick Davies, Gareth Johns and David Butt.