

State senators battle in culinary school 'Iron Chef' competition



By MARY ELLEN WRIGHT | Staff Writer | Posted: Friday, May 15, 2015 6:17 pm

Pausing as he chopped ingredients for his appetizer of tuna with lentil puree and radicchio-and-kiwi slaw, retired state Sen. Mike Brubaker held up a glass disc.

Standing in a kitchen at the Pennsylvania School of Culinary Arts in Lancaster Friday morning, Brubaker flashed the award he won last fall after defeating another state senator in a mostly-for-fun cooking competition.

“You know what that is?” Brubaker taunted Sen. Rich Alloway, who was standing over a hot stove at the other end of the kitchen.

“Yeah, that’s what I’m taking from you,” Alloway replied.

And he did.

Alloway defeated Brubaker in the second State Senator "Iron Chef" competition held at the culinary school, a division of YTI Career Institute.

Before three judges declared the winning dishes, the two former senate colleagues threw a lot of shade in the kitchen, ribbing each other good-naturedly about their cooking skills (or lack thereof).

The idea for the competition came, Chef Rob Poulton, the school’s program director for culinary arts and restaurant management, said, when Sen. Scott Wagner saw Brubaker’s photo on the wall of the school during a tour.

Wagner remarked that he could “cook Brubaker under the table,” Poulton said, and a senate culinary rivalry was born.

After Brubaker — who decided not to run for a third Senate term representing part of Lancaster County, and is now chief executive officer of Blackford Ventures — beat Wagner, he challenged Alloway for Friday’s cook-off.

Alloway represents the 33rd district, which includes York, Franklin, Adams and Cumberland counties.

Brubaker, who said Friday that his main kitchen experience was washing dishes at a restaurant and his fraternity at West Virginia University, didn’t realize that Alloway and his father ran a pizza shop in Chincoteague, Virginia.

He knows his way around a kitchen.



senators 1.jpg

Former Sen. Mike Brubaker, left, and Sen. Rich Alloway work at their cooking stations during the senatorial cook-off Friday.

“I do no cooking at all,” Brubaker said with a laugh.

“But I do have a tremendous appreciation for the people at this school,” he said. “I’ve gotten the opportunity as senator to see behind the scenes of what goes on here.

“This school is pumping out students who are job-ready” for the culinary industry, said Brubaker.

“Hey, Brubaker! This is how it’s done, boy,” Alloway interrupted from his cooking station.

The exaggerated smack talk notwithstanding, Brubaker said he challenged Alloway because they were friends in the Senate.

While both senators did a fair amount of chopping and stirring, each legislator was assigned a culinary instructor and a student to help him in creating an appetizer and an entrée with several “mystery ingredients.”

The day began with Brubaker hiding Alloway’s chef coat, said Poulton.

He said the legislative cook-off allows his students to have an out-of-the-ordinary culinary experience every few months.

And, because schools rely on help from the state, he added, it’s nice to let legislators see what goes on at the culinary school.

“And politics needs much more fun in it,” Poulton added.

“The guy cut kiwis and he thinks he’s a chef,” interjected Alloway, still agitating and eliciting laughter in the kitchen. “Mike Brubaker’s new nickname is ‘Kiwi Man.’ ... This is the hardest work this guy has done in years.”

Brubaker countered by getting a bunch of culinary students watching the cook-off from the hallway to chant, “Mike! Mike! Mike!”

As morning gave way to lunchtime, three judges declared Team Alloway’s appetizer and entrée the winners.

The dishes were sesame-crusting tuna with a salad of radicchio, orange and kiwi with coconut vinaigrette and sprinkled with crisp pancetta, followed by a seared duck breast with a ragout of lentils, hen-of-the-woods mushrooms and celeriac.

For the next legislative cook-off a few months from now, Alloway has already challenged Sen. Joe Scarnati, the state Senate’s president pro tempore. Brubaker has agreed to serve as a judge.

Gentlemen, start your burners.