

Meet the Dino Chefs

Best chefs in the region to duke it out in a no-holds-barred battle in the Top Dino Chef Competition 2014

News Release

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The Top Dino Chef Competition is back for another round of no-holds-barred battling to win over tastebuds and minds. This time the region's five best chefs will duke it out for the title of Top Dino Chef. The competition will take place at The Garden Party, a VIP reception on August 8, 2014, the day before the Amber Ball – a blow-out, celebrity-studded event to celebrate the completion of the museum building. With teams from Padrino's Italian Ristorante, Stonebridge Hotel, JAX Grill & Lounge, Middleton Food Services and Ric's Grill, the chefs will be pitted against one another to win the favour of those attending the reception – a crowd of about 75. Working with local honey, the 'secret ingredient' chosen by the reigning Top Dino Chef, Shaun Patton of the Stonebridge Hotel, the teams will create small plates which the attendees will sample, voting on their favourites. At the end of the evening, the votes will be tallied and the Top Dino Chef 2014 declared. Attendees at the event will include Dan Aykroyd, Donna Dixon Aykroyd and family, Paul Allen, Matthew Gray Gubler, Aubrey Plaza and Fran Drescher. The prize for the Top Dino Chef is a \$950 bottle of Old Main Red wine with a glass-etched label from Kettle Valley Winery in Naramata, British Columbia and a plaque declaring the Top Dino Chef 2014.

The Competitors:

Shaun Paton

Executive Chef, Stonebridge Hotel, Grande Prairie

Shaun Paton started his culinary journey in 1998 when he made the decision to follow his passion for food by attending Malaspina University in Nanaimo, BC. After completing a 1-year program there, he went to Jasper, AB to work at the Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge. During his five-year tenure at the Fairmont, he apprenticed under many great chefs and was part of some amazing experiences, from fine dining to celebrity chefs and even taking part in cooking for the Queen – an experience that not many get. In 2004 Shaun joined the Coast Pyramid Lake Resort as Sous Chef and progressed into his first Executive Chef position by 2005. After nine years in

Jasper, Shaun and his wife decided to relocate their family to Grande Prairie, AB. Previous to joining the Stonebridge Hotel, he spent four years as Executive Chef at the Holiday Inn.

Thomas Cheesman

Head Chef, Ric's Grill, Grande Prairie

Thomas Cheesman started cooking at The Keg in Grande Prairie in 2002 where he had the opportunity to learn the skills of a linecook and prepcook. Once he had those skills he began kitchen management and continued culinary training under Chef Darrel Johannson. Cheesman ultimately spent 11 years working for the Keg and really enjoyed the opportunity to learn and cater community charity/special events. His last few years of working at The Keg were mixed with periods of training at SAIT which led him to a Red Seal certification in the fall of 2012. The Chefs and students at SAIT were amazing and he really enjoyed their passion for great food, sustainability, and respect for the ingredients.

After The Keg he spent some time working at Maddhatters. Their involvement with local suppliers and food made from scratch were the draw for Cheesman.

After Maddhatters he took employment with Ric's Grill and has been there since October 2013. The owner/operator likes to be involved in the community and the menu is such that the staff make nearly everything in-house. Cheesman looks forward to more involvement in community events and eventually providing a training/work experience program for aspiring cooks/apprentices.

Bryan Theaker

Executive Chef, Padrino's Italian Ristorante, Grande Prairie

Growing up in Beaverlodge one can imagine Bryan Theaker's palate may have been flavored towards traditional small town Alberta meat and potatoes; and it was, but looking back he appreciates that his family ate locally-sourced meals. A move to New Zealand in 1994 opened his eyes to a whole new menu – from Alberta beef to New Zealand lamb, meat and potatoes had a new taste. Moving back to Grande Prairie in 2001, Theaker began working in the kitchen at Earls. He then headed to Calgary to study the culinary arts, graduating from the Culinary Professional Cooking Program at SAIT with honors. After graduation he began working for the Calgary Winter Club where he catered a private members-only club as well as a full banquet facility. In 2004 Theaker returned to Grande Prairie and began cooking at Sorrentino's Bistro. A move to Calgary in 2006 took him back to the Calgary Winter Club where he was the Sous Chef and obtained his Red Seal and Journeyman status. Returning home to Grande Prairie in the fall of 2010, Theaker returned to the Best Western where he is today, Executive Chef and Kitchen

Manager of Padrino's restaurant, where he enjoys working with local producers and local, fresh ingredients.

Abdel Benkhada

Executive Kitchen Manager, JAX Grill and Lounge, Grande Prairie

Abdel Benkhada is from Morocco and got his start as the Chef de Parti at the Amanjena Resort in Marrakech, Morocco in 2005. From there he became the Sous Chef at the Sheraton Marrakech and then served over three years as the Senior Sous Chef at the Shark Club in Grande Prairie. After nearly three years as the kitchen manager at the Acropolis, Benkhada made the move to JAX Grill and Lounge in the Podollan Inn & Spa in Grande Prairie. He has a diploma in Culinary Arts from Mohammedia Hotel and Tourism School in Morocco.

Richard Middleton

Owner, Middleton Food Services

Richard Middleton is a second-generation chef – his father was a founding member of the Canadian Federation of Chefs de Cuisine. Middleton is a Gold Seal chef who has worked on several film sets, including 'Titanic,' and several large sporting events including the Arctic Winter Games. He has cooked for the royal family on several occasions and for groups as large as 50,000. Middleton is presently the owner of Middleton Food Services.

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