

Soul food Smorgasboard at the 2009 Buffalo Urban League Taste of Soul

Local cooking competition is rich in traditional touches, but some of the winning dishes, had an exotic kick

By Janice Okun, NEWS FOOD EDITOR

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Cassandra Austin won a gold ribbon for her Pork Roast and Rice at the Taste of Soul Cooking Competition.

Harry Scull Jr / Buffalo News

Can the fundamentals of “soul food” possibly be expanding? You might be surprised. At the fifth annual Taste of Soul Cooking Competition and Family Festival held at St. John Baptist Church on Saturday to commemorate Black History Month, over 50 amateur and professional cooks entered their specialties for judging.

The spread was impressive, and delicious. And yes, there were plenty of the much-loved favorites like Corn Pudding and Fried Chicken, Greens and Sweet Potato Pie—after all, these are the traditional representatives of what Mayor Byron Brown called “food that puts you in mind of the recipes your mother and grandmother made.”

The mayor worked his way from stand to stand happily, brandishing his plastic forks and paper plates. “I’m going to take a lot of time here,” he said. “Soul food is Mom’s home cooking that you remember on cold winter nights and bright Sundays,” Lavera Johnson agreed.

And yet—and yet—there were some more exotic items on display. There was Marinated Grilled Mahi Mahi with Coconut Mango Risotto prepared by caterer Shetice Williams, who took second place in the Professional Chefs division.

Williams, who owns a catering service, said she entered the fish in the Caribbean division of the contest which also included Creole and African. “I didn’t want to do the same thing as everyone else,” she said. “I knew it would be different and I knew no one else was going to do anything with mahi mahi. Williams, who marinated the fish in red wine and added both white wine and coconut liqueur to the risotto, said she had a lot of fun with her creation. “I didn’t expect to win anything,” she said. But she did win second place.

Airic Thornton used unusual ingredients too and took third place in the Junior Chef Division for Lobster and Scallop Pasta with Cognac Cream Sauce. Sometimes, even the use of one nontraditional ingredient could make all the difference. Such was the case with Not Yo Momma’s Peach Cobbler, prepared by Bonni Nelson. The secret ingredient in the normally traditional dessert? Peach Brandy. Maybe the definition of true soul food should be described by the addition of Eunice Lewin’s comment.

“Soul Food has a kick,” she said. “It has excitement and energy.

“It is not bland.”

No indeed. And this year, too, a new section was added to the competition.

“Healthy Soul Food” was included for the first time in this annual affair sponsored the Buffalo Urban League, Tops Markets and the American Heart Association. Independent Health, Cornell Cooperative Extension, the American Diabetes Association and the Heart Association were on hand to



Sydnee Alston, a senior at Amherst High School, serves her Baked Chicken with Pastrami and Asparagus with Gnocci.

offer information and screenings. “We were concerned about the health disparities that exist in the African-American community,” explained Brenda MacDuffie, president and CEO of the Buffalo Urban League, referring to problems of obesity, cardiovascular illness, hypertension and diabetes. “We wanted people to experience some other options and how good they can taste.”

Entered in the healthy division were the likes of Tangy Fruit Salad, Vegan Banana Carob Chip Muffins and Red & Black Bean Salad. The winning Soulful Soup recipe called for no additional salt.

Many of these recipes cut down on the sugar and fat content, traditional soul food has sometimes contained. The use of olive and other oils instead of bacon and saturated fats was emphasized.

From Bonni Nelson:

Not Yo Momma’s Peach Cobbler

4 cans (29 ounces each) cling peaches, drained OR

3 pounds fresh peaches in season, peeled and sliced

2 tablespoons lemon juice

1 teaspoon vanilla

3/4 cup peach brandy (less or more)

1/2 cup unsalted butter

3/4 cup white sugar (more or less depending on the sweetness of the peaches)

3/4 cup brown sugar

1/2 teaspoon salt

1 tablespoon cornstarch

1/2 teaspoon nutmeg

1 teaspoon cinnamon

1/4 teaspoon ginger

1/4 teaspoon allspice

Dough:

2 1/2 cups flour

3 tablespoons white sugar

1 teaspoon salt

1 cup vegetable shortening

1 egg

1/4 cup ice water

Make dough: Mix flour, sugar, salt and cut in shortening until medium granules are formed. Add egg and ice water.

Roll out half the dough to about an eighth of an inch thickness. Bake in a preheated 350-degree oven for 20 minutes or until golden brown.

Mix peaches, lemon juice, vanilla and brandy. Add butter and cook over medium heat until butter melts.

In a mixing bowl, stir sugars, spices and cornstarch and pour this mixture into peach mixture. Remove from heat; pour peaches over the baked crust.

Roll remaining dough; place over peaches. Seal edges and cut slits.

Bake in the preheated oven for 40 or 50 minutes or until the top is golden brown.

(Note: Nelson used canned peaches but allowed them to sit in the lemon juice, vanilla and brandy overnight. Then she added the butter and preceded as above.)

**From Angelica Graham
Black Eye Peas Salad**

2 cans black eye peas, well rinsed

1 small onion, diced

1/2 yellow bell pepper, diced

1/2 orange bell pepper, diced

Dressing

(2 parts balsamic vinegar to 1 part commercial Italian dressing)

Fresh tomatoes (May substitute canned)

Pitted black olives, small or medium

Prepare dressing and combine with remaining ingredients.

Serve chilled. Makes about 8 servings.

From Carrie Meyer:

Tangy Fruit Salad

2 tablespoons instant sugar-free

vanilla pudding mix

1 cup light vanilla yogurt

1 can (15 ounce) pineapple chunks in juice, drained

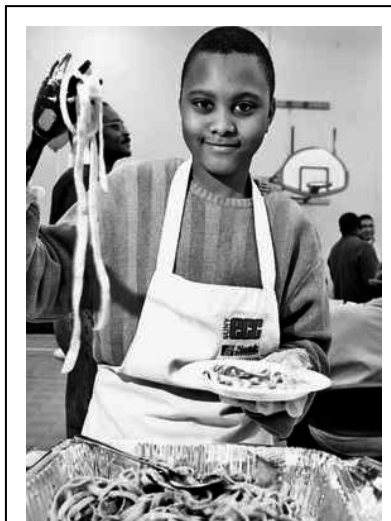
1 can (12-ounce) mandarin oranges, drained

1 cup grapes

2 medium bananas, sliced

Add pudding to yogurt and mix well. Stir in remaining ingredients.

Serve chilled. Makes 6 to 8 servings.



*Harry Scull Jr./Buffalo News
Airic Thornton, 14, used unusual ingredients and took third place in the Junior Chef Division for Lobster and Scallop Pasta with Cognac Cream Sauce at last weekend’s Taste of Soul Cooking Competition and Family Festival.*

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