

CULINARY ARTIST NATIONAL MEDAL WINNER AIMS TO BE A CHEF AND TEACH OTHER DEAF STUDENTS

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

Felix Diaz of Miramar has always wanted to be a chef.

Now, the McFatter Technical Center student is well on his way to that goal, and, in the process is gaining national recognition.

Diaz recently was awarded a gold medal in national competition in Kansas City for a culinary presentation of cantaloupe carving. He previously won a gold medal at state level competition in Bradenton

What makes Diaz unique is that the post-secondary school student is deaf and communicates primarily through sign language.

“He competed in a significant seven to ten minute presentation in front of a panel,” said Chef Paul Citrullo of Plantation who teaches culinary arts at the Davie school. “He demonstrated his action skills and had to make a verbal presentation which he did through his interpreter.”

“This was the first time that I have been in a competition,” Diaz said through his interpreter, Leith Campbell of Fort Lauderdale. “It was a wonderful experience. Cooking is my specialty and I enjoy it.”

Diaz said that he likes to work with cold foods such as fruits and enjoys preparing vegetable salads and doing food carving.

The McFatter school has gained recognition for its culinary classes since it first opened seven years ago. “We sent four students to the state competition last year and we had four students there this year,” Citrullo said.

In addition to Diaz, the school sent Max Buechler of Fort Lauderdale who won a gold medal in secondary school cooking, Michael Struyf of Hollywood who won a gold medal in secondary school food and beverage service and Ricardo Haskas of Hollywood who won a gold medal in post secondary school food and beverage service. The three students will join Diaz in the competition in Kansas City.

Citrullo said that the school had four national winners in previous competitions over the years.

“It’s the training that we offer them,” Citrullo said explaining why so many students from his department have succeeded.

“Our programs are all job preparation programs,” the teacher explained, adding that McFatter has program in printing, auto mechanics, computers and other technical

programs. “The idea is that all of our students will be employed when they are done studying here.”

Many of the technical high school’s students go on to college, Citrullo said. “We have five students at the Culinary Institute of America, several at Johnson and Wales College and a number who are in restaurant management.”

Diaz’s dream is to turn his cooking skills into a means of training other hearing impaired and disabled people.

“My goal is to do advertising on TV and to produce a show for the deaf,” he said. “I want to teach them how to cook.”

The program will be designed to reach any audience, not necessarily just those who are disabled, Diaz explained.

Diaz said that he plans on attending college next year. Although he has not selected a school yet, he said that he is very interested in Florida State University.

CULINARY ARTIST NATIONAL MEDAL WINNER AIMS TO BE A CHEF AND TEACH OTHER DEAF STUDENTS, *South Florida Sun-Sentinel*, July 25, 2003