

# Cooking up a storm

BY BRIDGETTE DONALD

**I**T was 'hot' competition for students from several secondary schools in Kuching when they participated in the "Next Big Chef" competition recently.

The king of spices, pepper, was the main character in the competition which was organised by UCSI University, a leading hospitality & tourism school in the region in collaboration with the Malaysia Pepper Board.

Held at a shopping mall in the city, the competition aimed to promote and nurture the unique skills and arts of the culinary profession while creating awareness of pepper throughout the event.

A total of about 80 students participated through the Next Big Chef School Series and 36 were selected for the semi-finals. Participating schools were SMK St. Teresa, St. Mary, St Thomas, DPHA Gapor, Sungai Tapang and Batu Kawa.

The university hoped that the competition would generally create an awareness pertaining to pepper, and encourages society to explore and see the different perspectives of pepper usage and its benefits.

The competition also aimed to alter the perception towards pepper products and aid in increasing awareness and popularity of the king of spices. Moreover, it will highlight related job opportunities in the global industry. Apart from that, the university aimed to instill an interest in cooking and food preparation in the younger generation.

The participants were required to prepare a set of international cuisine which consisted of an appetiser and main course. For the grand finale, 6 selected teams the from semifinal round are required to prepare a 3 course meal consist-

ing of an appetiser, main course and desert within the time frame of one hour 45 minutes, using pepper in each of their respective dishes.

A briefing on the competition detail was conducted prior to the competition and arrangements had been made by the University for the participants to meet up with their respective chef lecturers to discuss their menu in order for the participants to understand the fundamentals of pepper product implication and basic culinary technique.

During the grand finale, MasterChef Asia finalist Jasbir Kaur was invited to judge the event together with two executive chefs from Riverside Majestic and BCCK, namely Chef Azahari Aziz and Executive Chef Thomas Schmid.

The semi-finalists were Dayang Nurina Nazihah, Michelle Anak Wilson, Nur Afifi Zulaika Bte Abu Bakar, Aisyah Amirah Bt Mohd Ibrahim (SMK DPHA Gapor), Jordan Ajeng and Ahmad Rifqi bin Mohd Jerome Rinjis (SMK St. Thomas), Nur Rabiatul Adawiyah binti Hamri and Siti Nurhaziqah binti Yahya,

Judging criteria of the competition included taste, uniqueness, presentation and elaboration of their participating dishes.

After an hour and a half of painstakingly preparing the three required dishes, May Ivanna and Valerie Michelle from SMK DPHA Gapor were adjudged the winners. They received a RM20,000 UCSI Bursary with RM1,000 cash.

As first runner-up, Gloria Cumai Romano Romie and Hafiza Nurisha Abdullah from SMK St. Mary received a RM10,000 UCSI Bursary with RM500 cash.

Meanwhile, second runner-up Jordan Ajeng and Ahmad Rifqi bin

Mohd Jerome Rinjis, from SMK St. Thomas bagged RM5,000 UCSI Bursary with RM300 cash.

A variety of activities were organised throughout the two-day event such as "Junior Next Big Chef competition for children ages below 12", "Eat All You Can" promotion, SME's showcase, Pepper based product cooking demonstration and food tasting.

Among the sponsorship received by the universities are Malaysia Pepper Board and Nestlé Malaysia.

"The organisers should continue organising such events because it is a good way to get youngsters to

appreciate food and learn proper cooking techniques. So when they go off to university they know how to prepare their own meals and eat healthy, instead of living on fast foods or instant noodles," said Jasbir Kaur, who is known as the 'Spice Queen.'

"The pepper board did a good job by sponsoring the event as this encourages the contestants to appreciate spices and get creative because we seldom use pepper in our food except for seasoning."

Jasbir advised those who wants to learn how to cook to learn from someone experienced in the culinary arts. "It is good to learn especially for young mothers. Cook simple, healthy delicious meals for your children. Don't leave it to the maids to do the cooking because the amount of love a mother can put into preparing the food is different compared to a maid," said Jasbir who is a homemaker and a mother of three.

For more information on the event and courses available in UCSI University Sarawak campus call 082-455255 or visit [www.ucsi-university.edu.my](http://www.ucsi-university.edu.my)



THE contestants of Next Big Chef posing with the staff and students of UCSI.



WINNERS of the Next Big Chef Season 3. PHOTOS COURTESY UCSI



MUKVINDER Kau Sandhu, Chief Operating Officer of UCSI presenting a chef hat to Dato Grunsim Ayom.



**THE** young contestants with their parents posing for the camera after the cooking competition.



**EXECUTIVE** Chef Thomas Schmid and Masterchef Asia Finalist Jasbir Kaur sampling the food.



FATHER and son contestant posing with their dish.