

COMMUNITY



Andy Hopper, owner and operator of Chefs 105, will compete in the Culinary Combat event as part of the sixth annual Taste of Coastal Carolina March 10. (Photo contributed)

Chef prepares for 'Culinary Combat'

BY LINDSAY STREET
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Morehead City chef Andy Hopper, 27, will compete in the inaugural Culinary Combat at the sixth annual Taste of Coastal Carolina in New Bern March 10.

The event begins at 5:30 p.m. at Riverfront Convention Center, and tickets are \$25. Proceeds benefit the Neuse Riverkeeper Foundation.

The new Culinary Combat is an "Iron Chef" (a culinary program on Food Network) inspired competition, which pits two teams of local chefs against each other.

"It'll be a good time. It's not really a matter of being nervous or anything like that; it's good to get outside of the restaurant and show creativity. It should be fun," Mr. Hopper said.

Other chefs include Jason Haines of The Flame Restaurant, Vivian Howard of Chef & The Farmer, Gabriel Maldonado of the New Bern Golf & Country Club, Chris Maravelas of The Hurricane, and Brandon Qualls of Pia's Restaurant in New Bern.

The teams will be given a

secret ingredient to incorporate into their creation of two appetizers and one entrée. After an hour of preparation time, which will be emceed by Jeff Aydelette of The Pamlico News, a panel of judges will sample the items, rate them using specific criteria, and announce a winner.

Judges include New Bern Mayor Tom Bayliss, Bev Haight of Cooks & Connoisseurs, Phil Knight of CTV 10, and Miss North Carolina, Amanda Watson.

Mr. Hopper moved to Morehead City nearly two years ago and opened Chefs 105.

Originally from Greensboro, Mr. Hopper specializes in Italian and seafood cuisine.

"For me, it's just taking those things and putting an Italian-American twist on it," he said.

Mr. Hopper's restaurant has become well known for its shrimp and grits with pimento cheese and saffron lobster sauces, he said.

While earning a hospitality/hotel/restaurant management degree at East Carolina University, Mr. Hopper worked with the owners of Chefs 105 at a Greenville hotel restaurant and at Chefs 505. He left his sous chef's post at Chefs 505

for a two-year stint at The Four Seasons.

Mr. Hopper then worked as a sous chef at Spiaggia in Chicago. Spiaggia is the city's only four-star Italian restaurant, a consistent nominee for the prestigious James Beard Foundation Award and a place Time magazine has called "the Oscars of the food world."

Last year, Mr. Hopper won first place for a black truffle and lobster risotto at the Beaufort Wine and Food Weekend gala.

Tickets for Taste of Coastal Carolina in New Bern can be purchased online at the foundation's Web site, www.neuse-river.org, or call Diane Baldwin at 637-7972.