

Battle of the Pans raises money for homeless programs



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Kayla Klein, center, Alex Flores, right, and Elsa Muscarella, background, of Norwich Free Academy plate their food to present to the judges for the Battle of the Pans competition against New London High School at the Blaustein Humanities Center on the Connecticut College campus in New London on Friday, Nov. 18, 2016. The competition was presented by Thames River Community Service and Connecticut College. (Dana Jensen/The Day)

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By **Greg Smith** (/apps/pbcs.dll/personalia?ID=g.smith) Day staff writer

✉ g.smith@theday.com (mailto:g.smith@theday.com)  [SmittyDay](http://www.twitter.com/SmittyDay) (http://www.twitter.com/SmittyDay)

New London — It was a cook-off touted as the newest rivalry between New London High School and Norwich Free Academy — whose Thanksgiving Day football game is one of the longest-running traditions in the state.

New London triumphed in the first-ever Battle of the Pans student cook-off on Friday, the winning students posing with an engraved and mounted frying pan that will travel each year to the winning school.

In the end, though, it was more friendly rivalry than cutthroat competition, and all for a good cause.

The seven students chosen to participate, while intense, were obviously having fun — smiling, laughing and, in at least one case, performing impromptu dances while preparing meals. Students from both schools bumped elbows and jockeyed for stove space in the cramped quarters of the kitchen at Connecticut College’s Blaustein Humanities Center.

“The kids are having a good time. That’s what’s important,” NFA Chef Jason Everett said. “Hopefully, this is the first of many years of the rivalry.”

NFA students Kayla Klein, Elsa Muscarella and Alex Flores cooked up honey-glazed chicken, whole-grain apple bread stuffing and root vegetables. Flores sweated over a frying pan preparing the chicken and said, “I think regardless of who wins, this will be a great outcome.”

The results of judging by culinary students from Ella T. Grasso Technical High School, under guidance of Chef David Miguel, was a 1.8-point difference out of a possible 100 points.

New London student Shineika Fareus said the idea behind her school’s offerings — roasted chicken with yellow rice and grilled pineapple — was to blend the cultures represented by team members who were American, Haitian and Ecuadorean.

“We have so many different racial backgrounds, we thought it would be fun to combine them,” Fareus said.

New London team members included Fareus, Kethia St. Hilaire, Melinda Alvarez and Jacky Kral — all seniors at the Science and Technology Magnet High School of Southeastern Connecticut.

Dan Giusti, the professional chef re-inventing school lunches (<http://www.theday.com/local/20160923/chefs-transforming-new-london-school-lunches>) in New London with his company Brigaid (<http://chefsbrigaid.com/>), said the meal from the students he mentored was something he actually could convert into a school lunch.

In fact, Everett said both meals conformed to U.S. Department of Agriculture standards for a school lunch — which severely limits the costs per meal.



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Judge Colby Wolfe of the Ella T. Grasso Technical High School takes a serving of New London High School's arroz amarillo, yellow rice dish from Ecuador, epis, a marinated chicken dish from Haiti, coleslaw made with the epis marinade and roasted pineapple

during the Battle of the Pans competition against Norwich Free Academy at the Blaustein Humanities Center on the Connecticut College campus in New London on Friday, Nov. 18, 2016. The competition was presented by Thames River Community Service and Connecticut College. (Dana Jensen/The Day)

The real winner at the end of the night was the young parents and children who live at the Thames River Family Program, a service of the Norwich-based Thames River Community Service; in addition to the \$50 per person entrance fee and cash bar, raffles were held, and all of the night's proceeds will go to the program.

"In these divisive times, it's special for us to come together in the spirit of rivalry, committed to working together for the most vulnerable in the region," said Tracee Reiser, director of community partnerships at Connecticut College.

One of the raffle prizes was a dinner for six to eight people prepared by Giusti at the winner's home.

g.smith@theday.com (<mailto:g.smith@theday.com>)

Editor's Note: *This version corrects the spelling of Shineika Fareus's name.*