



Photographs by Ryan Morrill



YUM! (Clockwise from top right) Chefs Allen Walski (left) and Ashley Pellegrino (right) parcel out their Brussels sprouts creations, with help from parent Karen Bezel, as part of a cook-off at the E.J. School. The students vote for their favorite dish. Chef Richard Vaughan takes first place, and the honor of hoisting the Brussels sprouts scepter. Vaughan made sprouts chips.



'The Last Veggie Standing in Our Garden'

E.J. Students, Chefs Join for Celebration Of Brussels Sprouts

As the students of the Ethel A. Jacobsen Elementary School gathered around tables in the cafeteria last Friday afternoon, three local chefs concocted a special dish in the kitchen, to be served up for the kids' edible enjoyment, and their votes. The main ingredient? Brussels sprouts, grown in the gardens on the school property in Surf City.

"E.J. is celebrating the last veggie standing in our garden," with a special Brussels sprouts cook-off, said school nurse Bianca Aniski, who has been influential in establishing and maintaining the plot.

"School gardens are a wonderful addition to any school," remarked E.J. School Principal Frank Birney. The gardens, he explained, bring the classes outside, and what's growing in the ground lends itself to various lessons, as the students learn about the planting and tending processes as well as healthy eating.

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"Not every school has a school-yard garden," Birney said to the students. "We are very lucky."

As the chefs finished preparing their dishes, Birney announced the panel of judges that would, along with the students, help decide the winner: Peter Kopack, superintendent and LBI School principal; Jennifer Bott, LBI Board of Education president; Jennifer Begonia, LBI PTA vice president; and Joanne Miller, E.J. School secretary.

Local families that helped water

the garden over the summer were then recognized: the Barra family, the Cleary family, the Colavita family, the Salluce family, the Bott family and the Nasti family, as well as Southern Regional High School Project ASPIRE.

Lorraine Kunick, a service representative from Atlanticare Food Corps – a nationwide team of AmeriCorps leaders that connect students to healthy foods – was also present. As Aniski explained, E.J. has been awarded a \$1,500 AtlanticCare Healthy Schools, Healthy Children Mini-Grant for the garden.

Second-grader Jimena Ortiz read a Brussels sprouts poem to set the mood for the impending competition.

Chefs participating in the Great Brussels Sprouts Cook-Off of 2016 were Ashley Pellegrino of Black-Eyed Susans in Harvey Cedars; Allen Walski of The Arlington in Ship Bottom, who is an E.J. alumnus; and Richard Vaughan of Bistro 14 in Beach Haven.

First up, Pellegrino served her dish of raw Brussels sprouts, cleaned and shaved, with Granny Smith apple and celery root bits, tossed with olive oil, salt, sugar and apple cider vinegar, and a little bit of cheese.

Samples were passed around to the students, a number of whom asked for seconds.

Next, Walski presented roasted Brussels sprouts with pickled grapes, "the secret ingredient."

"I really like the pickled grapes,"

noted one youngster.

During the serving and eating of the first two dishes, there were exclamations of "It smells so yummy" and "I loved it!" at the tables, amid debate over which fare was tastier.

Finally, Vaughan announced his dish – "These are Brussels sprouts chips" – to a collective "ooohhh"

from the crowd.

Soon, a cheerful chant of "We love Brussels sprouts! We love Brussels sprouts!" erupted at one of the tables, complete with a thumping of forks in little fists to the rhythm of the background keyboard music.

After finishing the last contender's offering, the students voted

with tokens, and it was Vaughan who took first place, and earned the honor of clutching the Brussels sprouts scepter.

"We would like to thank all three chefs for taking the time to come out," said Birney, who reserved his utmost praise for the children "for all your work in the garden." —J.K.-H.