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By RACHEL COLEMAN

Leader & Times

The judges nearly outnumbered the entrants in the Pancake Day cooking contest Saturday, but that didn't diminish the dazzle.

"I think they're getting more creative," said longtime judge and owner of Liberal's Pancake House restaurant, Elma Davis. With fellow judges Tracy Compaan and Ikey and Bill Orick of Oklahoma City, Davis named a winner: Krista Holcomb, for "Candied Bacon Kabobs."

The stacked skewers of miniature pancakes and sweet, savory bacon were inspired by Holcomb's fondness for small pancakes, she said.

"And, everyone loves bacon, so why not?" she added.

The win was made especially sweet by the competition: second-place cook was Lynn Volden — Holcomb's mother, and the person who persuaded the young mother to enter the competition.

“I’ve always hated cooking, but my mom and husband talked me into entering,” Volden said. “When I was growing up, my brother was the kitchen person with my mom. Now that I have a family, I’m kind of getting used to cooking more.”

Volden said a phone call from her son in Indiana confirmed her daughter’s summary of the family’s cooking history.

“If my son was here, absolutely, he’d enter this contest,” she said. “When we talked to him on the phone, he asked Krista, what was going on. — ‘Are you my sister?’”

Holcomb won out over roster of breakfast-themed entrées, including two types of apple muffins, a cinnamon-roll cake and sausage muffins.

Event supervisor Mike Brack, a trained chef himself, said the judges used a simple rubric to evaluate the foods submitted.

“Forty percent is taste, 25 percent originality/creativity, 25 percent using the product (pancake mix), and 10 percent appeal,” he said.

Ikey Orick, who has served as a food judge for the Oklahoma State Fair for two decades, said the Pancake Day cooking contest is on par with her experiences across the state line.

“It’s always good,” she said. “People always surprise me with what they come up with.”

Brack said he often hears would-be entrants express reluctance about the public nature of the competition.

“One comment we always hear from people is that they’re intimidated by putting their names out in public with a contest like this,” he said. “It’s a lot of fun, though, and we try to offer people encouragement and great prizes. I hope we have more next year.”

To enter the competition, cooks had to bring a prepared dish, along with the recipe used, to the contest site Saturday morning. The recipes had to be original creations, with exact instructions; each recipe was required to use pancake mix as an ingredient. Other than that, the possibilities were wide-open; entrants were not confined to breakfast-themed dishes.

All the winners, including third-place cook, Mike Bailey, for his sausage muffins, received gift baskets stuffed with kitchen paraphernalia and food items.

Once judging concluded, the contest booth, sponsored by the Soroptomist Club of Liberal, offered bite-sized samples of the food to the public.

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