

GROCERY GOSSIP

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Chopped Canada is a cut above

CHOOSE CHOPPED: *Chopped Canada's* recent premiere claimed an all-time network high audience, with the inaugural episode of the new Food Network Canada series smashing previous audience records, making it the highest-rated series premiere in the network's history. (Note: See Joe Belanger's column below on the winner of last week's competition.)

The nail-biting series also sent the rest of the competition to the chopping block as the 10 p.m. broadcast drew in the highest audience against all entertainment specialty programs of the night across all key demographics.

Chopped Canada is the first Canadian edition of the hugely popular Food Network U.S. series *Chopped*. Hosted by Dean McDermott (winner of *Rachael vs. Guy: Celebrity Cook-Off* season two), *Chopped Canada* is a high-stakes culinary competition series where four chefs compete before an all-star panel of expert judges, including Lynn Crawford (*Pinch It!*), Chuck Hughes (*Chuck's Week Off*), Michael Smith (*Chef Michael's Kitchen*), Susur Lee (*Top Chef Masters*), Roger Mooking (*Head Seekers*), Vikram Vij (*Top Chef Canada* season 1 & 2), John Higgins (George Brown College) and Anne Yarmowich (formerly FRANK Restaurant).

■ Check out Foodnetwork.ca.

CHOPPED FROM CHOPPED: When the opportunity to participate in a media-only Food Network Canada CHOPPED experience at the George Brown Culinary school came up recently, I literally jumped at the chance. I love black box competitions, and I was thrilled that most of the judges from the highly engaging reality show would be in attendance, along with the affable host, Dean McDermott. We're talking some heavy-duty talent. And I was partnered with the lovely Kris Reyes, news anchor and TV personality with Global TV — visibly pregnant and gracious in the face of adversity when she cut her finger five minutes into the competition. Ever the pro, she gracefully carried on, while I, frantic when I saw the black boxes of beef tenderloin, Canadian cheddar cheese, grapefruit and cake sprinkles of all things, started creating a whole dinner from scratch — a meal we had only 30 minutes to produce. Reyes and I looked at each other and started pulling out ideas faster than the changing weather. I broke



Rita DeMontis and Global TV's Kris Reyes participate in a Chopped Canada media challenge recently. *Chopped Canada* premiered to great acclaim on Food Network in early January.

the golden rule of black box competitions by making the dish complicated — marinating the beef in grapefruit juice and soy, boiling potatoes to sprinkle with cheese and candy and sautéing sliced mushrooms with garlic and parsley. I also came close to burning the whole place down when I seared the meat. Trying to finish the beef in the oven, the meat came out a bloody raw mess, so I seared the medallions in a hot pan. We assembled the dish in record time, and it looked nice — but, sadly, cold. The judges were kind — well, most were, save for Vikram Vij who had a touch of the nasties in his critique. Susur Lee was beyond kind, and Lynn Crawford cheered us on. We didn't win, but the experience was

fabulous — and we had a chance to hear the host McDermott tell us we had been chopped. A great experience, a great show! Check out the video online.

■ New episodes of *Chopped Canada* air on Food Network Canada, Thursdays at 10 p.m., with encore showing Saturdays at noon and 8 p.m.

JOE BELANGER
QI Agency

TOP OF CHOPPED: A Fanshawe College professor has taken top prize in the premiere episode of *Chopped Canada*, a new Food Network Canada show.

Stephanie Brewster, a chef instructor at Fanshawe with more

than 25 years of experience in the industry, won \$10,000 on *Chopped Canada*, the network's Canadian edition of the popular Food Network U.S. series, *Chopped*.

"I saw a call for auditions and I was urging my graduates to compete and then they started telling me I should audition," said Brewster, a mother of four adult children, in a recent telephone interview. "I started thinking about it and thought that sometimes it's good to challenge yourself, because you can get in a routine (after teaching for 11 years) and you never want to lose that creativity, your passion and that drive."

The show, which aired last Thursday, can also be seen online at Foodnetwork.ca. Brewster, 47,

competed against Matt Binkley, a private chef who has cooked for celebrities and royalty around the world; Jonathan O'Callaghan, chef de partie at Museum Tavern in Toronto; and Tim Schorno, executive chef at the Granite Restaurant in Bancroft.

A chef is "chopped" from competition after each course.

The three judges were celebrity chef Michael Smith, author and host of *Chef Michael's Kitchen*, *Chef Abroad*, *Chef at Home* and *Chef at Large*, seen on Food Network; chef Vikram Vij, owner of Vij's Restaurant and Rangoli in Vancouver, and chef Anne Yarmowich, former executive chef at the Art Gallery of Ontario's food and beverage operation, including the AGO's FRANK restaurant and now teaching at George Brown College.

In this show, the chefs had to create an appetizer using a potato, bone marrow, mac-and-cheese loaf and anchovy paste.

Then it was on to an entree using strawberry milk powder, chayote (South American fruit), microwave popcorn, tofu, Asian noodles and crab meat.

And for dessert, the two finalists were asked to present their own interpretation of bread pudding using three-spice powder, Montreal bagels, chickpeas and a butter-scootch pudding cup.

"We are so proud of Stephanie and her win on *Chopped Canada*," says Jeannine Cookson, chair of Fanshawe's school of tourism and hospitality in a press release.

"We are fortunate to have a team of chefs and faculty members, like Stephanie, who work every day to ensure our students receive only the best training and career preparation for this industry."

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New coconut chip a groovy kind of snack



HIPPIE HAPPINESS: Hippie Snacks Coconut Chips, a new addition to the Hippie Foods product line-up from Left Coast Naturals (an organic and natural food manufacturer and distributor based in Burnaby, B.C.) deliver a delicious and convenient way to enjoy a typically very inconvenient food — coconut. Made from slices of whole young coconut roasted in small batches to achieve a perfect crunch, this

snack features just three simple ingredients: Coconut with a touch of cane sugar and sea salt. A nutrient-packed alternative to conventional chips and snacks, Hippie Snacks Coconut Chips are creamy with satisfying sweet and savoury flavours. Hippie Snacks Coconut Chips can be found at natural retailers such as Whole Foods Markets.

■ Check out Hippiefoods.com for additional details.



BREWSTER