

Republican. PLUS

POWERING **MASS LIVE**



Holyoke Mayor Alex B. Morse and Christina Royal, president of Holyoke Community College, prepare dishes outside City Hall for Holyoke Farmers' Market debut cook-off on Aug. 31. (STEVEN E. NANTON PHOTO)

HOLYOKE

Chocolate challenges chefs

Mayor Alex Morse takes top honors in debut Farmers' Market cook-off

BY MIKE PLAISANCE
mplaisance@repub.com

The fire chief darted into the farmers' market and returned with the key ingredient: apple cider doughnuts. To go with cheeseburgers.

"John's kicking it up a notch; he's going doughnuts," state Rep. Aaron M. Vega, D-Holyoke, one of the event's judges, said about Fire Chief John A. Pond.

Nonetheless, Pond managed to

finish in a three-way tie for second place in the recent Holyoke Farmers' Market debut cook-off, won by Mayor Alex B. Morse.

Morse was declared the winner with a stir fry of sliced potatoes and grilled zucchini bread topped with peaches and drizzled with maple syrup and chocolate.

"It's amazing. It's really good," Ada Fernandez, co-owner of Fernandez Family Restaurant and one of the event's judges, said of Morse's customizing of the zucchini bread.

That bested the tacos ("carne asada tacos") created by Stephen K. Zrike, the receiver in charge of the Holyoke Public Schools, and the chicken stir-

fry made by Christina Royal, president of Holyoke Community College.

Pond's cheeseburgers were accompanied on the side with doughnuts topped with melted chocolate.

"I think we're all winners here tonight, but most of all, Holyoke is the winner with our great farmers' market," Morse said.

Chocolate was the mystery ingredient sprung on the contestants at the last minute and which they had to incorporate into their dishes.

The judges, who also included chef Neftali Duran of Nuestras Raices, graded on a 1 to 10 scale, with 10 being best.

SEE **CHEFS**, PAGE P6

Chefs

CONTINUED FROM PAGE P1

Morse had a 19, or two scores of 6 and a 7.

Pond, Zrike and Royal each had two scores of 5 and a 7, for a total of 17 each.

Morse received a plaque. Actually, all the contestants received plaques from farmers' market manager Andres Villada, prompting "everyone wins just for participating" jokes.

Villada hosted the event and roamed through the crowd with a microphone, interviewing people, encouraging the contestants and warning them about the time.

The competition was held on the City Hall lawn on High Street beside the weekly farmers' market, from which contestants used bell peppers, squash, zucchini, tomatoes, onions, kale, blueberries, peaches and other items.

"I really like that they used a lot of ingredients from the farmers' market," Duran said.

Building in the chocolate couldn't have been easy, he said.

"That's hard, really hard, because it's like really sweet chocolate," Duran said.

With the crowd watching, music blaring and clock ticking, the four officials did their deadline grilling. They had 45 minutes to create a dish.

Pond finished 16 minutes early.

"It's the Fire Department. There's no wasted time," he said.

"I am making a healthy dish because I want the judges to have a long, prosperous life in Holyoke," Royal said, laughing.

"Mine is everything in one, you get appetizer, meal and dessert at once," Zrike said.

"This is a very hearty meal but also healthy," Morse said, submitting his plate to the judges.

"There's a lot of ingredients on that plate," Duran said.

"There's no rhyme or reason to it," Zrike said.

Sign-holding Holyoke public schools employees cheered on Zrike.

"What do you think of your supporters?" Villada said.

"They weren't required to be here," Zrike said.

Contestants were not above diplomatic politicking, Royal comparing the tomatoes she used from the farmers' market to the city's iconic Merry-Go-Round.

"I tried to draw some inspiration from Holyoke itself," Royal said.



Holyoke Fire Chief John A. Pond cooks at the grill while Stephen K. Zrike, the receiver in charge of Holyoke PD prepares a meal in the background in the Holyoke Farmers' Market 1st annual Cook-off in front of City Hall.

(STEVEN E. NANTON PHOTO)



Clockwise from upper left, Mayor Alex B. Morse's winning entry, consisting of zucchini bread, potato, chocolate, peaches and maple syrup; Stephen K. Zrike's meal; Christiana Royal, president of Holyoke College, carries her finished dish to the judges' table.

(STEVEN E. NANTON PHOTOS)