

Best Chef in Canada Crowned at 2006 Canadian Culinary Championships Held in Whistler, BC

WHISTLER, BC, Feb. 5 /CNW/ - He's young. He's hip. And now he's the best chef in Canada. Makoto Ono of Gluttons Restaurant in Winnipeg, Manitoba walked away with the gold at the Gold Medal Plates' Canadian Culinary Championship held this past weekend in support of Olympic and Paralympic athletes.

Ono emerged as the frontrunner among the seven finalists, winning the gold medal following three days of delicious and spirited competition at the Hilton Whistler Resort and Spa. Michael Blackie, of Ottawa's Brookstreet Resort was awarded silver and Mark McEwan of Toronto's North 44 took home the bronze. An elite judging team comprised of the country's most discerning palates led by National Culinary Advisor James Chatto, chose Ono for his "original lightness of touch, artistry and the clarity of his flavours."

At just 28 years old, Ono has been in the business 10 years, having trained in Vancouver and in London, England. Originally an arts student at the University of Manitoba, Ono switched to food because he saw it as "a different medium." Ono has evolved his culinary style into something that can best be described as "personal cuisine", using Japanese influences combined with French techniques.

"This weekend was so nerve wracking," says Ono, "and I was pretty intimidated being with chefs I've admired for years."

The seven chef finalists - all having achieved gold in their home cities, came to the culinary "games" with dedication, discipline and a passion to excel that mirrors the Olympic spirit of Canada's finest elite athletes. The Gold Medal Plates 2006 program, which began last fall with a regional competition held in Halifax, Nova Scotia, has moved westward across the country celebrating culinary excellence, culminating in the final competition at Whistler, British Columbia, site of the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Regional winners competing for gold this weekend were:

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Halifax: Ray Bear, Gio
Ottawa: Michael Blackie, Brookstreet
Toronto: Mark McEwan, North 44
Winnipeg: Makoto Ono, Gluttons

Edmonton: Michael Brown, The Westin Hotel
Calgary: Michael Lyon, Giorgio's Trattoria, Banff
Vancouver: Robert Clark, C
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"From coast to coast, Canada offers world class cuisine and this competition is a platform for bringing together and sharing the best culinary talent in Canada," says Stephen Leckie of Gold Medal Plates. "Through this program we are pleased to honour the vision and dedication of the finest Canadian chefs in support of elite summer and winter high performance athletes."

Day One - Thursday February 1

Chefs were presented with a mystery bottle of wine and asked to pair it with the perfect meal. They were given \$300 to design and prepare the gourmet meal that also included providing samples for the 50 attending guests. The meal, worth one-third of the total marks, was presented Saturday morning.

Day Two - Friday, February 2

The chefs participated in the "Black Box" Competition, whereby they were given five mystery ingredients, had 10 minutes to decide what to prepare with them, and then 60 minutes to prepare the meal for judging. Inside each black box were venison flanks, quinces, hot house sweet peppers, scallops and dulse (Atlantic seaweed).

As chefs quickly prepared their dishes in front of the judges and the cross-Canada crowd of culinary enthusiasts, it became clear that emotions and the competition were firing up with the ticking of the clock. Intense and exciting, each chef delivered his outstanding presentation to the sound of rapturous applause as the spectators cheered on their home-city favourite.

In the afternoon, chefs embarked on their shopping spree in and around Whistler village for ingredients using their limited \$300 budget. Their creativity and negotiating skills were put to the test as they stretched every dollar while hunting for each ingredient.

Day Three - Saturday, February 3

The morning began with the blind wine pairing competition that had been introduced to the chefs Thursday evening. Each chef presented his ideal meal

to complement the mystery wine, (the award-winning Jackson Triggs Cabernet Sauvignon Grand Reserve 2004) also worth one-third of the total marks.

The final competition and grand finale invited each competitor to prepare his own signature dish, with deciding votes cast by the judges and more than

150 attending guests. True to every heart-racing, dramatic Olympic podium finish, the competition was close, with only five percentage points separating

the gold from bronze position. At 8:50 p.m. Ono was crowned Canada's best chef

in front of an enthusiastic and well fed crowd that included: Steve Podborski,

bronze medallist, alpine skiing, **Ross Rebagliati, gold medallist in snowboard**

and Paul Rosen, gold medallist goalie with the Torino 2006 Paralympic Winter Games ice sledge hockey team.

"I really hope this event builds awareness for the culinary arts, especially in Winnipeg," says Ono. "I'm serious about food and it shouldn't matter where you live to practice your art."

Established in 2003, Gold Medal Plates celebrates Canadian excellence and culture in support of Olympic and Paralympic athletes. Since its inception, more than \$1.5 million has been raised to help elite winter (through Own the Podium - 2010) and summer athletes (through the Road to Excellence initiative) succeed in their pursuits.

The Canadian Olympic Committee is a national, private, not-for-profit organization committed to sport excellence. It is responsible for all aspects of Canada's involvement in the Olympic movement, including Canada's participation in the Olympic and Pan American Games and a wide variety of programs that promote the Olympic Movement in Canada through cultural and educational means. www.olympic.ca.

VANOC is responsible for the planning, organizing, financing and staging of the XXI Olympic Winter Games and the X Paralympic Winter Games in 2010. The 2010 Olympic Winter Games will be staged in Vancouver and Whistler from February 12 to 28, 2010. Vancouver and Whistler will host the Paralympic Winter Games from March 12 to 21, 2010. www.vancouver2010.com

Gold Medal Plates www.goldmedalplates.com will begin its cross
Canada
search for the 2007 Culinary Champion this October. Who will succeed
Ono as
Canada's best chef?

Television: B-Roll from the Gold Medal Plates challenge is
available.

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