

StarChefs.com names Carolina winners

StarChefs.com, an online magazine that stages regional parties to recognize “up-and-coming chefs and culinary professionals,” found nearly all of the talent for its Carolina Rising Stars gala in Asheville and Charleston. The cities are home to eight of the 11 chefs participating in a Dec. 11 tasting at Memminger Auditorium.

“In Charleston, we found a tight-knit community of chefs that sees itself as the keeper of what is one of the richest food traditions in America,” editor in chief Antoinette Bruno is quoted as saying in a release from the organization, which considered 100 chefs in 18 cities and towns for the honor.

Bruno added that Asheville chefs have distinguished themselves by being “weird,” in keeping with the town’s unofficial slogan.

Charleston’s chef honorees are Husk’s Travis Grimes, Two Boroughs Larder’s Josh Keeler, FIG’s Jason Stanhope and Butcher & Bee’s Stuart Tracy.

Charlestonians also made the cut in a number of additional categories: David Schnell of Brown’s Court Bakery was an “artisan” winner; Aaron Siegel of Fiery Ron’s Home Team BBQ took the “concept” prize; Social Restaurant + Wine Bar’s Brad Ball shared the “sommelier” title with Maximilian Kast of Fearrington House; and The Gin Joint’s Joe Raya claimed one of two “mixologist” awards.

Attendees who buy \$85 tickets (or \$115 tickets, if they want VIP status and the caviar reception) will undoubtedly eat well. But it’s the few chefs who hail from beyond the Carolina powerhouses who may well emerge as the evening’s breakout stars.

Vivian Howard of Chef &

the Farmer in Kinston, N.C., has received increased media attention since starring in a PBS series and serving Saturday lunch at the fall symposium of Southern Foodways Alliance, which has energetically championed her work. Howard also is the lone female on the list of winning chefs. She's planning to serve pencil cobb grits with sweet potato mostarda and dried mullet roe.

But the guy to watch is Nate Allen of Knife & Fork in Spruce Pine, N.C. Allen and his wife, Wendy, in 2009 relocated to the tiny mountain town from Los Angeles, trading their private chef roster of celebrity clients for a 35-seat dining room. Locals initially weren't sure what to make of the Allens' referring to "streaky meat" as pork belly and pairing it with quinoa waffles and bok choy, but the restaurant has become a vortex of pride for an economically depressed county. Yet widespread recognition has

largely eluded Allen, although he did pick up a "Small Town Chef" award from *Cooking Light* in 2011.

I'm completely biased on this score. Knife & Fork was where I celebrated my birthday when I lived in Asheville: Allen's cooking persuaded me to forgo my annual tradition of driving to McCrady's for dinner. The nasturtium panna cotta with sumac water, pesto, flowers and salted seed pods that Allen's making for the party could dissolve on my plate, and I'd probably like it. Still, my prediction is he'll nail the panna cotta, and possibly leave a few South Carolinians thinking about heading up to his restaurant in January and

February, when he's shelving the usual menu in favor of weekly themed dinners: The Valentine's Day theme is Chicago 1931 (I'll save you a trip to Wikipedia: That's not the year of the Valentine's Day Massacre.)

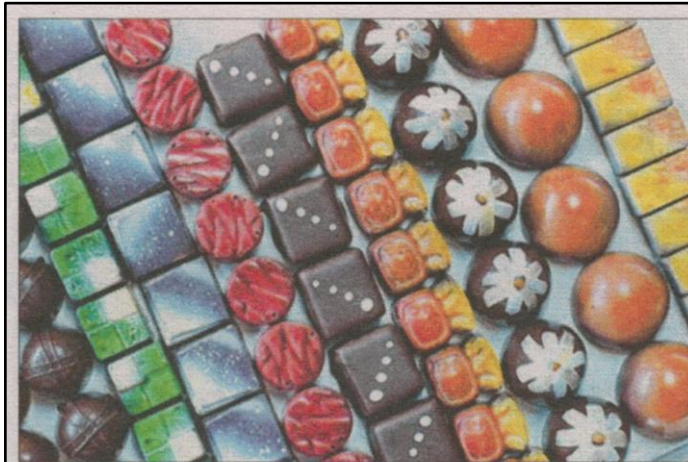
There are a number of other savvy picks on the list. In

addition to the Charleston choices, StarChefs.com wisely recognized Brian Canipelli of Cucina 24 in Asheville, who makes a mean cacio e pepe, but is preparing beef carpaccio for the Charleston crowd; William Dissen, who's successfully freshened up Asheville's The Market Place without straying from its founding mission of supporting local farmers; and the brewers from Asheville's Wicked Weed, who plan to pour a Coconut Curry Wit.

To purchase tickets to the gala, which begins at 6:30 p.m., visit www.starchefs.com/risingstars.



Coconut Curry Wit from Wicked Weed Brewing in Asheville, N.C.



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Chocolates from Hallot and Danielle Centeno Parson of Escazu Artisan Chocolates in Raleigh.



Country terrine, chicken liver pate, pickles and pistachio pesto from chef Mike Moore of Seven Sows Bourbon & Larder Chicken in Asheville.