

Talented Culinary Specialists Train At CIA-Greystone

Service members invited to the annual Armed Forces Forum for Culinary Excellence are distinguished for their culinary and foodservice management skills, and an elite group went on to receive individual overall awards recognizing their talent.

Judges who decided the winning teams in the Air Force John L. Hennessy, Marine Corps W.P.T. Hill and Air National Guard Senior Master Sgt. Kenneth Disney awards selected a group of 30 culinary spe-

completed.

Previously, the panelists spoke about their experience, but the format was revised this year. Each of the 30 service members attending the forum was asked to think about a question and submit it in writing.

Military panelists responded to questions about the future of foodservice ratings, but the service members were eager to find out from the industry members what drove them to be successful and what



A group of 30 culinary specialists learn new skills and brush up on techniques during the annual weeklong Armed Forces Forum for Culinary Excellence at the Culinary Institute of America in Greystone, Calif.

cialists to attend the forum.

These 30 outstanding service members, selected from the award-winning U.S. Air Force and U.S. Marine Corps culinary teams, learn new skills and brush up on techniques during the weeklong educational and training forum, which was held Nov. 16 to 24 at the Culinary Institute of America in Greystone, Calif.

For 2013, Marine Cpl. Daniel Russo is the Major Gen. W.P.T. Hill Food Service Specialist of the Year; and the overall Hennessy Travelers Association Award winners are: Senior Airman Sarita Camacho, Moody AFB, Ga., and Senior Airman Maria McGinnis, JB Lewis-McChord, Wash.

The weeklong educational program available at the forum not only develops culinary skills through hands-on training, but is an opportunity to gain valuable career advice through networking with hospitality industry experts as well.

This year's forum featured a question-and-answer session featuring a panel of experts that included restaurant CEOs explaining professional career options for culinary specialists once their military service is

qualities they look for when hiring, as well as ask for career advice, such as how to become part of a restaurant chain.

"This year, we did something very different; we didn't pose a question we wanted to ask, we posed a question students wanted to ask," said Dick Hynes, president of the Hennessy Travelers Association and director of consultant services at Hobart Corp. "They obviously put a lot of thought into it."

Hynes thought the culinary specialists came away from the discussion with a greater awareness of the importance of education, certification, honesty and work ethic in achieving their career goals.

"The more education you get, the better off you are," he said, explaining that includes culinary training, as well as understanding the business side.

The culinary forum lets the service members see a path to follow after completing time in the military. "A lot of them don't know what they want to do, but their eyes open up by talking to the group," said Joe Kruszewski, of Kraft Food Group, who participated in a mentoring session at the forum. "The whole

key is education; you have to have that foundation in place to experience new opportunities.”

Further motivating service members were tours of restaurants in the CIA-Greystone area, including the French Laundry and the Napa Valley Wine Train.

Thomas Keller, chef and owner of the prestigious French Laundry restaurant, unexpectedly spent an hour and a half talking with the service members when they visited his restaurant as part of the training available during the forum.

“They knew this was a big deal to spend time with a top chef,” Hynes said.

Since opening in 1994, the French Laundry has garnered Keller a reputation as an innovator in the food industry. Over the next decade, he opened three additional properties

While visiting the Napa Valley Wine Train, a group of culinary specialists received hands-on experience working in the kitchen with Kelly MacDonald, the executive chef. Passengers aboard the train dine inside a fully restored 1915-17 Pullman Dining Car or a 1952 Vista Dome car as they pass the vineyards and wineries of Napa Valley.

Service members working aboard the Wine Train were on the winning team in culinary competition at the forum. The 30 service members selected to attend the forum are divided into four teams that work together throughout the week.

Individual award winners were announced during the forum by U.S. Air Force Brig. Gen. (sel) Patrick Doherty, A1S, director of services, DCS, Manpower, Personnel and Services, HQ, USAF. All nominees attending the forum were provided training and presented a special medallion by Doherty; the individual overall winners received a \$1,000 scholarship.

Training provided at the Armed Forces Forum for Culinary Excellence further enhances the culinary specialists’ military foodservice expertise. There are hands-on classes, seminars and roundtable discussions in which leaders of the restaurant and foodservice industries share best practices and personal career experiences.



Thomas Keller, chef and owner of the prestigious French Laundry restaurant, unexpectedly spent 90 minutes talking with the service members who visited his restaurant as part of the training available during the forum.

The Marine Corps individual overall award is the Food Service Specialist of the Year.

Each team of Hennessy evaluators annually selects two Hennessy Traveler’s Association Award of Excellence winners from among 11 nominees, six in region one (the eastern United States and Europe) plus five in region two (western United States and Asia). Awards winners exemplify the highest standards of professionalism, attitude and culinary skill.

“The National Restaurant Association (NRA) is proud to support our active servicemen and women and military veterans and help shape them into future restaurant leaders,” said Art Myers, National Restaurant Association Military Foundation (NRAMF) board member. “The military community is a vital part of the restaurant industry and the Major Gen. W.P.T. Hill awards is our way of honoring Cpl. Russo and the men and women before him who have been shining examples of excellence in foodservice.”

The NRAMF grew from the NRA’s decades-long partnership with the Hennessy Travelers Awards program. Established in 1956, the program honors the dedication, pride and fellowship of the military foodservice personnel.

More than 250,000 military veterans are employed in the restaurant industry. In the next five years, the NRA projects the number of additional employment opportunities to increase by 25,000.