

Press-Telegram

Sandwich makers duel at Olives Gourmet Grocer in Long Beach

By Josh Dulaney, Staff Writer

If it's for free, it's for me. So I jumped -- as much as a man 40 pounds overweight can -- at the chance to judge a sandwich-making contest at Olives Gourmet Grocer at 3510 E. Broadway in Long Beach .

Thursday kicked off National Sandwich and Panini Month. The contest winner would take home a \$100 gift card to Olives, and have their sandwich featured on the menu.

Seeing as how the most exotic sandwich I've ever made was when, as a boy in North Carolina, I stuck a cut of livermush between two pieces of Wonder Bread, I asked Olives owner Erin O'Hagan what the secret is to a good sandwich.

"To me, what makes a good sandwich is the layers of flavor," O'Hagan said. "You want to taste every ingredient in a sandwich."



Recipe competition at Olives Gourmet Grocer in Long Beach August 1, 2013. Sandwich makers compete for a \$100 Olives gift card, and the honor of having their sandwich printed on the restaurant's menu throughout National Sandwich and Panini Month. (Thomas R. Cordova/Staff Photographer)



Lindsay Dennison of Long Beach makes her Spicy Veggie at the sandwich recipe competition at Olives Gourmet Grocer in Long Beach August 1, 2013. Dennison won an Olives gift card, and the honor of having her sandwich printed on the restaurant's menu throughout National Sandwich and Panini Month. (Thomas R. Cordova / Staff Photographer)

I ate three great sandwiches. So did my fellow judges: Ashleigh Ruhl, editor for Gazette Newspapers, and Charles Karel Bouley, host at KGO Radio and a Huffington Post writer.

Ruhl maintained her dignity, sitting between a man who was reminded by a colleague to shake the crumbs out of his "Grizzly Adams beard," and Karel, who nearly turned the contest into a cross between "Chopped" and "Project Runway" before a handful of the contestants' friends and relatives.

Jodi Serfaty, a 43-year-old Mission Viejo resident, presented "Tuna Melt on Steroids," a Muenster cheese delight filled with sliced banana peppers and Spanish olives. I'll spare the snooty cable cooking show language and simply say: that was some good grubbin'.

Janet Swenson, a 52-year-old resident of Fallbrook, brought a filet mignon goat cheese sandwich to the table.

"It's something you can drink with a beer or cabernet," Swenson said.

Indeed. Swenson's sandwich, featuring portabella mushrooms and sliced Vidalia onion, typically on ciabatta bread, would be at home at a backyard barbecue or on a Waterford dinner plate. It's a filling sandwich that can take the fight out of a foodie, with flavors gently accenting the filet mignon.

Lindsay Dennison, a 19-year-old Long Beach resident, was the big winner of the contest, which scored the sandwiches on taste, texture and presentation, among other factors.

Lindsay's Spicy Veggie, with chipotle aioli, red onion, cucumber and thinly sliced avocado on a wheat roll, was a cohesive offering that surprised and satisfied with each bite.

Dennison mixed a perfect amount of oregano, chopped jalapeno and black olives to make the taste buds dance.

The sandwich will be featured as a special on Friday. It will be on sale at Olives for \$6.99 during the month of August.



Lindsay Dennison, of Long Beach, stands with the owners of Olives after winning the sandwich recipe competition at Olives Gourmet Grocer in Long Beach August 1, 2013. Dennison won a \$100 Olives gift card, and the honor of having her sandwich printed on the restaurant's menu throughout National Sandwich and Panini Month, Lindsay Spicy Veggie. (Thomas R. Cordova/Staff Photographer)