

Global travels await New Zealand's best hospitality apprentices

News release issued on behalf of the Hospitality Standards Institute

New Zealand's top hospitality apprentices will soon be jetting around the world to further their career experiences after taking out the top honours at the Hospitality Standards Institute's Modern Apprentice of the Year competitions.

Heather Kaniuk, from dine by Peter Gordon restaurant in SkyCity Auckland has been selected as the NZ-UK Link Cookery Modern Apprentice of the Year. Heather won a six-week work experience placement in the UK and also received a chef's knife set from hospitality outfitting agency Southern Hospitality.

Meanwhile, Ashley McIvor from the Millennium Hotel in Queenstown won a two-week trip to the Australian wine-growing region of her choice after placing first in the HSI Food & Beverage Modern Apprentice of the Year.

Both winners were announced at the Hospitality Standards Institute's conference gala dinner held in Auckland on July 14.

Speaking at the prize presentation, HSI chief executive Steve Hanrahan praised both Heather and Ashley for their dedication in preparing for the competitions, then having the steely nerves required to perform under pressure in front of the judges.

"Once again, New Zealand's best young apprentices have shown that the future of this country's culinary and restaurant service industries is in an extremely healthy state," Steve Hanrahan said proudly.

"Year after year the calibre of competitors in the apprentice of the year competitions has remained at a consistently high level – reflecting the esteem with which the hospitality industry places on trainees reaching the finals. All finalists are to be congratulated for the months of hard work and preparation they put into reaching for their ultimate goals. New Zealand can be rightfully proud of them all," Steve Hanrahan concluded.

The NZ-UK Link Foundation which sponsored the NZ-UK Link Cookery Modern Apprentice of the Year, is an organisation which creates and promotes educational and cultural exchanges between New Zealand and the United Kingdom. Since its inception in 1990, the NZ-UK Link Foundation has supported 150 individuals and groups from such industry sectors as marine biology, fashion design, the arts and hospitality.

NZ-UK Link Foundation representative Phillipa Falloon said the organisation was proud to be encouraging the development of young New Zealanders in their chosen culinary careers.

"The experience gained from this exchange programme will launch Heather upon a career many young chefs could only dream about. Yet through sheer hard work and determination, she has achieved a goal of representing her country," Mrs Falloon said.

"Through this exchange programme, the reputation of young New Zealand chefs is quickly being enhanced wherever they work throughout the UK. It was pleasing to see the winner comes from Peter Gordon's signature New Zealand restaurant and will now have the fantastic opportunity to work with him in his London restaurant. That says volumes about how committed Peter Gordon is to training young chefs to participate in this exchange scholarship."

Both Heather Kaniuk and Ashley McIvor acknowledge the incredible support HSI provided throughout their respective competitions, and in organising the sensational prizes.

"This competition has been really exciting, quite challenging, and a lot of fun," said 19-year-old Heather who has been cooking at dine by Peter Gordon since September last year.

“My chefs at SkyCity – Warren Bias and Peter Ray – have been extremely supportive in helping me train for this competition and I owe them both a huge amount of thanks.”

During her six-week sojourn to the UK later this year, Heather hopes to secure cooking spots in such well known restaurants as the Italian-theme Locanda Locatelli, the famous Le Gavroche run by the Michel Roux, the funky Zuma Japanese restaurant, the Connaught Hotel, Clarke’s restaurant which has a high proportion of female chefs, and the hotel restaurant Maze set up by Gordon Ramsay.

Heather’s winning dish in the cookery finals consisted of: seared tuna sashimi with pawpaw, salted red onion and coriander salad, drizzled with a raspberry balsamic dressing. Main course was eye fillet with cumin glazed moi moi potatoes, wilted spinach, ginger popped cherry tomatoes, battered onion rings then topped with a mushroom and blue cheese sauce. Dessert featured chocolate mousse cake with red wine poached rhubarb and a lime brandy snap.

Ashley McIvor was equally enthusiastic about her upcoming overseas trip. Ashley’s prize is a \$2000 trip to an Australian wine-growing region of her choice (potentially either the Hunter Valley) where she will undergo in-depth wine education tuition. The food and beverage winner’s prize also included a full bartending equipment set– sponsored by hospitality outfitting agency Southern Hospitality.

“Winning this competition has been the highlight of six weeks of intense training. I must thank my restaurant manager William Levitt for all the time he put into helping me prepare, and the chefs in the kitchen here too who helped develop my food knowledge. They’ve all been such a strong support,” said 19-year-old Ashley from her Queenstown hotel workplace.

Ashley has worked at the Millennium Queenstown for the past two years and is completing her modern apprenticeship later this year. She eventually hopes to travel abroad and expand her already impressive food and beverage knowledge.

The other finalists in the 2006 HSI Cookery Modern Apprentice of the Year were:

Suzette Bliss, SkyCity, Auckland.

Haley King, 47 Restaurant, Waiuku.

Aaron Harland, Beesonline, Waimauku

Ashley Pirie, Eat Catering Company, Taupo

Philip Bryant, Park Heritage Hotel, Rotorua.

Blake Thornley, Crowne Plaza Hotel, Christchurch.

Kevin Hari, Finc Dining Room, Wellington.

Meanwhile, the other finalists in the 2006 HSI Food and Beverage Modern Apprentice of the Year were:

Sacha Letford, Royal Lakeside Novotel, Rotorua.

Jocelyn Caughley, Millennium Hotel, Christchurch.

Joseph Virbickas, Skyline Skyrides Rotorua.

Amy McPhail, The George Hotel, Christchurch.

Ashleigh Moorhead, Copthorne Hotel and Resort Bay of Islands, Paihia.

The judging panel for the NZ-UK Link Foundation Cookery Modern Apprentice of the Year consisted of: Phillip Kraal (Le Bon Bolli, Christchurch), Stephen Thompson (Verran’s Café, Auckland), Rex Morgan (Citron Restaurant, Wellington) and Anita Sarginson (New Zealand Chef’s Association/Flying Burrito Brothers, Wellington). The New Zealand Beef and Lamb Marketing Bureau sponsored food products in the mystery box, and assisted with purchase of competitors’ chef jackets.

Meanwhile, the judging panel for the Food and Beverage Modern Apprentice of the Year consisted of: Cameron Douglas (AUT), Geeling Ng (Soul Bar and Restaurant, Auckland), and Wendy Hillyer (Citron Restaurant, Wellington).

For further information and photographs of both apprenticeship winners, contact Hospitality Standards Institute project and marketing manager, Kate Flower, telephone 04 802 7819, mobile 0272 468 405 or email kate.flower@hsi.co.nz