

# FOOD



KAZ NOVAK, THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

Lindsay Vandekamp is heading off to compete at Skills Canada.

## Lindsay has lots cooking

BY LAURA MUELLER

You'd think a chance to beat out future star chefs for the top student culinary prize in the country would likely be the highlight for someone at the start of their career.

But Lindsay Vandekamp, an Ontario entry in the Skills Canada cooking competition, says she has already experienced her highlight.

The 31-year-old Beamsville resident says she's most proud of Dinner On Us, a program she started seven years ago at St. John's Presbyterian Church in Grimsby that gives a free, healthy meal once a month to people who cannot provide one on their own.

That experience and a stint cooking for seniors at a nursing home convinced Vandekamp to turn her passion for food into a career.

She enrolled at Liaison College in Hamilton, the city's only professional chef's school. She completed the advanced cook course and won the Steel Chef Hamilton challenge at The Hamilton Spectator Food & Drink Fest.

A few weeks ago, Vandekamp took the gold medal in the Ontario

Technological Skills Competition, and she's heading to Calgary to compete next week against winners from each province in the Canadian Skills Competition.

Vandekamp takes pride in adding unique presentation details, such as a mat of woven vegetables, to her dishes. That might be just the edge she needs in Calgary.

Contestants are given a menu — on one day of the competition it's cream of asparagus soup, stuffed pork tenderloin with sauce Robert, duchess potatoes, braised red cabbage and choux-paste pastries for dessert — and then it's up to each cook to add individual touches to appeal to the judges.

The exhaustive judging process evaluates not only the taste and presentation of the food, but also the chefs' adherence to staggered deadlines for each dish (to mimic restaurant service), the organization of their workspace and cleanliness.

To prepare, Vandekamp has been busy designing her dishes, finding efficient ways to cook them and practising several times a day from start to finish.

"These past two weeks have been

'hell week.' It's hard for me to focus, and I get distracted and very nervous," Vandekamp said. "But I find that once I get in there and start cooking, I'm fine, because that's what I love to do."

But as she learned at the Ontario competition, even skill, passion, and practice aren't enough to ensure a win.

"Nobody's perfect," Vandekamp said. "Everything that could have gone wrong went wrong ... I didn't think I had done that well."

"She takes criticism very well, but she's very tough on herself," says Nicole Harrison, administrator at Liaison College and a friend of Vandekamp's. "She takes what the judges say about her plate and learns from it."

Whatever the outcome is in Calgary, Vandekamp says she plans to take a "vacation" this summer to work as a sous-chef in British Columbia.

And then?  
"I'm going to cook for Oprah!" says Vandekamp with a laugh.

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THE CANADIAN PRESS

Rice acts as a thickening agent in this hearty soup.

## Rice is nice in creamy soup

Rice exposes its hidden talent in this hearty warming soup. When puréed, rice acts as a thickening agent, which cuts down on the fat while retaining that velvety texture of a traditional cream soup.

### Creamy Vegetable Soup

Makes 4 to 6 servings

- 2 tbsp (30 mL) olive oil
- 2 cups (500 mL) EACH chopped leeks (white part only), celery and carrots
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tsp (5 mL) dry mustard powder
- 1/2 tsp (2 mL) EACH salt, pepper and thyme
- 1/2 cup (125 mL) dry white wine
- 6 cups (1.5 L) low-sodium vegetable broth
- 1 cup (250 mL) long-grain white rice
- 1 cup (250 mL) EACH broccoli and cauliflower florets
- 1 bay leaf
- 1/4 cup (60 mL) chopped parsley

In a large saucepan, heat oil over medium-high heat; cook leeks, celery, carrots, garlic, mustard, salt, pepper and thyme until vegetables are tender crisp, about 10 minutes.

Stir in white wine, scraping any bits from bottom of pan. Cook until wine is reduced by half, about 5 minutes. Pour in vegetable broth, rice, broccoli, cauliflower and bay leaf. Simmer until rice and vegetables are tender, about 30 minutes. Remove bay leaf.

Transfer half of soup to food processor, puréeing until smooth. Return to saucepan with remaining soup and stir in parsley. Serve in warmed soup bowls.

Note: Purée all of soup for smoother texture.

**Approximate nutrition per serving (when serving 6):**  
250 calories, 5 g fat, 4 g protein, 41 g carbohydrates, 4 g fibre  
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