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Sweet Charity 2017 Winners Dish on This Year's Event & The Secrets to Their Success



This year's Sweet Charity event, a dessert competition held at Whitford Country Club that benefits the Chester County Community Foundation, brought out many of the area's best chefs for some fierce and delicious competition.

From the wonderfully wacky Trix cereal marshmallow treats and unicorn layer cake by Cakes & Candies by Maryellen to the bitesize mudslide and chocolate mint shooters by New Street Catering and Gemelli Artisanal Gelato's tiramisu gelato bites, there was no shortage of innovation or indulgence. Guests roamed the banquet rooms enjoying the desserts and golf course views, each with a single wooden nickel in hand for voting. Professional judges including The Town Dish's own Mary Bigham also weighed in separately, adding another layer to this sweet competition.

This year's four winners for Best Desserts by popular and professional votes as well as the winner of Most Creative Dessert shared their recipes for success and a little bit about what this charitable event means to them.

General Warren Inn Wows the Judges



Patrick Byrne of General Warren has attended Sweet Charity for about a decade now. He and pastry chef Andy Sciarretta's divine Praline Pecan Cheesecake took the top prize of Best Dessert as voted by the professional judges.

He recalls, "Over the last few years we went 'outside the box,' sometimes with success. We won two years ago with a Brownie S'mores that I made with a portable campfire. William Bunch, the host, was keeping an eye on me with a fire extinguisher nearby. But this year we went with a very solid performer on our current dessert menu."

The cheesecake, indeed, performed impeccably. A gluten-free crust supported the cheesecake, which was adorned with a pecan and praline topping and included a secret ingredient that Byrne says "stays in the vault." Landing somewhere between eclectic and old school, this dessert represented the General Warren aesthetic well. "We marry contemporary food with classics," Byrne says, "so we watch the latest in trends and go with our intuitions with menu design and also for these types of events."

For Byrne, Sweet Charity is a wonderful yearly experience of connecting with the community that General Warren holds dear. As a destination of hospitality for over 270 years, Byrne says that General Warren is "woven into the fabric of Chester County." He loves Sweet Charity for the friendly competition and the opportunity to consort with loyalists and potential patrons alike.



To experience the wow factor of General Warren firsthand this season, check out the restaurant's Spring House Terrace, a lush outdoor dining area impenetrable to the hustle and bustle of the outside world. Happy hours and a special Tavern Terrace menu are available Monday through Friday from 4:30–6:30 p.m. There is an outdoor bar, and guests are also welcome to order from the full menu for an upscale treat in this historic and vibrant little patio. While there, don't forget to sample General Warren's delectable array of housemade desserts that landed the restaurant on top at this year's Sweet Charity.

Fan Favorite John Serock Ties for Most Popular

This year John Serock Catering scored a hat trick with its third consecutive Sweet Charity win. The treat that did it was a Chocolate Hazelnut Tortellini with Strawberry Cream Sauce. Made with actual chocolate pasta dough, these authentic tortellinis were stuffed with hazelnut cream. Serock added a touch of marshmallow and served them in a spoon atop a dab of strawberry cream sauce, finished with a chopped hazelnut drizzle and a micro mint garnish.



The result was a spoonful of perfectly paired flavors that evolved in the mouth. “Layers and layers,” Serock says. “With that first taste you have to get a lot in. That one bite has to seal it.”

A well-tuned balance of savory and sweet has become Serock and executive pastry chef Melissa Jenkins’ signature move. Their first Sweet Charity entry three years ago was an apple and rhubarb taco topped with cinnamon whipped cream. In 2016 they played on the classic combination of grilled cheese and tomato soup with a strawberry mascarpone balsamic grilled cheese on country sourdough served alongside a strawberry soup shooter. “That was my favorite,” he says.

Like many others, Serock loves the social element of Sweet Charity, which kicks off a series of local charity events as well as his catering company’s busy season. “I was joking with Patrick from General Warren that we get to do these two to three events together, and then we don’t see each other for six months,” he says. Besides weddings every Saturday from April 1 through New Year’s Eve, Serock looks forward to catering upcoming events by the Brandywine Health Foundation, YMCA and the West Chester BID’s annual Up On the Roof.



He says that, as the first event to follow his company’s slow season, Sweet Charity “gives our kitchen something to look forward to. They have creative freedom and go wild with it. And we ultimately come up with other menu items in the process.”

Sweet Charity was also the impetus for expansion within Serock’s company. “Three years ago, when I got involved, we were not known for pastry and dessert.” He says he used to outsource until winning an award at the 2015 Sweet Charity. “That year when we won, we hired our first pastry chef. Now we have two full-time pastry chefs and desserts are produced in house.” He says they get “creative and crazy sometimes” with dessert inventions and often rely on what’s fresh and available as the creative springboard. Their signature sweet is bread pudding, which they serve at dessert stations. These stations typically include two or three types of bread pudding such as chocolate chocolate chip, a tropical variation and bananas foster cooked to order.

Serock believes the quality of the event gets better every year. “I tasted a few things when we got there and I thought, ‘We’re in trouble,’” he recalls. “A few things blew my mind. There’s lots of talent in this area.”

The talent of John Serock Catering is integral to many Chester County events throughout the year, and never disappoints.

Crowd Pleasing Carlino’s Nets a Tie for the Popular Vote



Executive pastry chef Jessica Pachorkowsky-Perez of Carlino’s Market in Ardmore and West Chester returned to Sweet Charity after a two-year hiatus to be awarded Best Dessert by the popular vote. Though Carlino’s has won other awards at Sweet Charities past, this marks its first time winning by wooden nickel. How did it feel? “Awesome,” Pachorkowsky-Perez says, adding, “We were surprised because we haven’t gotten that award. I felt really good about that.”

She says she enjoys participating in Sweet Charity as a unique opportunity to focus solely on sweets and felt that this year’s event was “beautiful—so well put together.”

Pachorkowsky-Perez says Carlino’s takes a lot of time getting ready for Sweet Charity. “We really take it seriously.” This year they entered with a White Chocolate Amaretto Dacquoise, which was a layered little treat that nearly melted in the mouth.

Pachorkowsky-Perez says the dessert was inspired by the change in seasons. “Some of the things we feature in the winter are heavy and decadent,” she explains. “Dacquoise came to mind because it’s really light. It sounds decadent but it’s light and refreshing. It’s also a flavor combination I had never put together.”

Is your mouth watering? This exceptional dacquoise might just be hitting the shelves of Carlino’s in West Chester. Pachorkowsky-Perez says, “In the past, whatever we have made for Sweet Charity we make and sell in-store and add it to the menu.” This has included a berry-misou creation (tiramisu without the coffee flavor), which Pachorkowsky-Perez says was “really fun.” She explains that the dacquoise poses unique challenges as a meringue that does not hold up for very long, explaining that it will likely be reconfigured and served in a more resilient form. “It will probably be a cake slice.”



Pachorkowsky-Perez offered a sneak peek into Carlino's spring and Easter lineup. New this week is a raspberry key lime pie that has a raspberry jam layer and raspberry whipped cream. Also on deck is a lemon roll of vanilla sponge cake filled with lemon curd pastry cream and topped with vanilla cream. Of all the truly spectacular treats she creates, Pachorkowsky-Perez says, "I love to make cookies." She uses original recipes from Mama Carlino. "She taught me how to make almost all of her recipes, luckily and fortunately."

Pachorkowsky-Perez says she feels Carlino's, as an artisanal market, brought something to Chester County that it hadn't had before. She loves working in the borough of West Chester, an area where, she says, "The community gives back."

"It's nice to get to know people that come in on a regular basis. We know how they like their coffee. We know what they're going to order for breakfast, what desserts they like. It's awesome," she adds.

The next time you're in the borough, swing by Carlino's for a slice of something delicious. We suggest starting with dessert.

Sweet Charity Newcomer Milito's Gets Creative



Milito's Ristorante joined in on the Sweet Charity fun for the first time this year and walked away with the award of "Most Creative" dessert by the professional judges. The treat that scored this honor was The Funky Monkey, a banana bread, cinnamon roll pudding filled with chocolate and peanut butter and stacked with layers of banana and peanut butter mousse.

Milito's owner Joe Milito says winning "was pretty awesome, actually." He credits Milito's pastry chef James Brunner, who he says is "very creative" and enjoyed the process. "It's fun for him. He can take multiple product types and bring it into one. A lot of his dishes have a wow factor. He's very artistic in his delivery."

Brunner learned his craft in Colorado Springs, Colorado, which Milito says is a challenging place to learn and pushed Brunner toward an exceptional level of understanding. "There's a changing environment. With the high altitudes, it's different almost every day. He mastered quite a bit."

Milito hopes to return to Sweet Charity in the coming years, an event that fits with the aims of his family-owned restaurant, which routinely seeks out charities to support. "It's so important for Milito's to provide, to help out. We will always do that and this was another opportunity. I thought it was a nice way of bringing people together for a good cause and an opportunity to bring awareness to what's important."

If you'd like to try the Funky Monkey yourself, it can be found on Milito's menu, served with your choice of vanilla ice cream or gelato. It joins a Brownie Float of graham cracker cake filled with smoked chocolate ganache as well as various tiramisus, pies and pastries that rotate on the specials menu Thursday through Saturday.

Milito's will open its patio on April 1, an expansive deck area that sits right on the Brandywine Creek. What better way to welcome spring than with a Funky Monkey alfresco?

Sweet Charity is not all about dessert... It's a gathering place for those who care about the important work that local charities do and it's an evening when good things happen. Sweet Charity benefits the Chester County Community Foundation, which grows legacy philanthropy throughout the region. The Community Foundation helps families and businesses become involved in charitable giving for the long run, by encouraging legacy gifts and increasing awareness of the needs and issues facing Chester County. The Community Foundation holds over 340 funds in trust and annually awards \$2.5 million in grants and scholarships.

Keep your eyes on the Chester County Community Foundation to join in on next year's Sweet Charity event on March 19, 2018, a philanthropic dessert experience like no other. In the meantime, check out the year-round offerings of these four fabulous institutions to experience the fine creations of their award-winning chefs.

John Serock Catering photos: John Serock Catering

Patrick Byrne photo & Carlino's dacquoise photo: Michele Kornegay

General Warren terrace photo: General Warren

Milito's Ristorante photos: Milito's Ristorante

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