

BRUM CHEFS FIGHT FOR BALTI HONOUR



And the winners are: From left, Simpsons' Luke Tipping, Duet's Anuj Arora, Khadka Bahdur and Abid Hussain, and Aktar Islam from Lasan.

By Catherine Lillington
STAFF REPORTER

TOP chefs kept a cool head as they battled for the honour of cooking Brum's best balti.

Duet, based at Fort Dunlop, won the contest, dedicated to the dish for which the city is best-known.

The restaurant, which opened in 2007, impressed judges who included Gordon Ramsay's Best Local Restaurant winner Aktar Islam, of Lasan, Luke Tipping, executive chef of Michelin-starred Simpsons, and *Birmingham Mail* food critic Paul Fulford.

Proud Duet owner Abid Hussain said the business had survived starting up during a recession



Taste test: Judges taste the best baltis at Birmingham College of Food.

by building a reputation on word of mouth.

He said: "A lot of businesses

have come and gone at Fort Dunlop. We have no passing trade, it's all been about food quality, service

and word of mouth. I'm really proud of my team and my chefs for their hard work and dedication and we are hoping to build on this now."

The restaurant outshone competition from five other finalists across the city.

Last year's inaugural contest was launched as part of the council's £1 million Tornado Recovery Programme to boost Sparkbrook in the wake of the 2005 disaster.

Luke said he hoped the competition would expand to allow restaurants around the country to take part.

He said: "It brings the whole food of the city together. The standard we've seen is very good on the whole."

"It's only in its second year so it's still in its infancy. There is a bit more buzz than last year and it can only grow."

Aktar said the competition was good news for balti lovers who come to the city for the dish, which was invented in Birmingham in the mid-1970s.

He said: "The balti is very important for Birmingham."

Mail man Fulford said: "The variety of food shows how vibrant and exciting Birmingham's curry house scene is. Chefs tried really hard and there were some remarkable flavours."

The prize included a silver balti bowl and the chance to provide Asian cuisine for civic banquets.

Art classes at new centre

A FORMER Solihull shop has been transformed into a space for people to try their hand at arts and crafts.

Solihull Council and North Solihull Regeneration have taken over the old Pound Spot shop on Kingshurst Parade, and are now offering a series of free art sessions.

Local artists will be on hand to help out at the sessions, which include digital photography, still life drawing and knitting and start with an information session on Monday from 10.30-11am.

It is hoped that the sessions will encourage people of all ages to try a new skill. Details on 0121 704 8349.

Hunt for junior judges to pick holiday helpers

ONE of Britain's biggest holiday companies is looking for two X Factor-style judges from the Birmingham area - but they must be aged nine-12.

Haven Holidays needs the junior judges to help them select 350 Haven FunStars to join the company's entertainment team for the 2011 season.

The budding Simon Cowells will join a panel of assessors and be expected to put their questions to FunStar

hopefuls as well helping potential candidates to actively demonstrate their ability to interact with youngsters.

The FunStars selected for 2011 will have a greater role in running children's club so the verdict of junior judges on the selection panel is seen as essential.

Birmingham children interested in acting as judges at the event can download an application form from www.haven.com/juniorjudges

They will also be expected to submit a video clip of themselves to show just how good they are at interviewing people.

Selected Junior Judges will need to be available to attend the FunStar auditions in Birmingham on Wednesday.

They can look forward to a VIP day and go home with a goody bag including a voucher for a free holiday - so they can see the successful FunStars in action.

Mike Olley

ALDERMAN OLLEY'S INSIDE VIEW OF POLITICS

Rise in VAT will mean less jobs and spending

MANY would say all the political parties have looked the same now for a while.

Maybe this is true, maybe not? Whatever the truth is, with the VAT bombshell there is now a clear divide between Labour and the Con Dem alliances policies.

Roughly speaking there will be about a quarter of a million people reading this paper.

Over the next year all those good folk will pay an extra £49m in VAT. In Birmingham, Sandwell, Solihull and Walsall where this paper is sold that population will pay, on average, an extra quarter of a billion pounds.

Some will say but "we need to pay off the deficit". Of course we do, but at what cost? All that extra money going to the Government has a cost, nothing is for nothing. As VAT is a tax on consumer spending the increase will result in less spending.

According to the respected, independent Chartered Institute of Personal and Development, it will mean 250,000 less jobs across the UK. That's about 5,500 jobs lost in our area. It could be you!

With VAT everyone has to pay, however the richer you are the less you pay, proportionately. The poorer you are the more it costs.

The Tories and Lib Dems have chosen to tax the poorer harder and let the richer off. Ironically, David Cameron "warned" us about this back in May 2009. He said "if you look at the effect of sales tax, it's very regressive, it hits the poorest the hardest. It does it absolutely promise you."

Nick Clegg announced in April 2010 that "our plans do not require a rise in VAT. The Conservatives' plans do." Nick spotted the Tory VAT bombshell. Trouble is when Tory Chancellor, George Osborne, dropped it he stood on the sidelines applauding.

So the difference is Labour offers you more jobs and less tax.

■ What do you think? Do you agree with Alderman Olley? Email letters@birminghammail.net



Agreement: David Cameron and Nick Clegg agreed the rise.