



**Charles Lazzareschi, executive chef**

Dayton Street Grille in the Concourse Hotel, 1 W. Dayton St.

Susan Kepecs on Friday 10/31/2008

### **WHAT WERE THE RULES OF THE DUEL?**

Over three days, five chefs were narrowed down to two for the final contest. In each round we had to make two plates highlighting the mystery ingredient, which was always a complete surprise. Before they unveiled it, you got a mystery box with a few complementary ingredients you might want to use, but that's your only clue. Stella Artois was an event sponsor, and you got an extra point if you used their beer as an ingredient. They had the whole range, blond to dark, and I used it in every dish. Belgian beers are great — it worked very well.

### **WHAT WERE THE SECRET INGREDIENTS?**

The first day it was opah, a Hawaiian fish. The second day, as a shock, they gave us five pounds of duck liver. I did all right with it; I made it to the finals. The last day we got American Kobe flatiron beef. I'd gone in with a plan, but I never expected opah or duck livers. The first thing I thought when I saw those was paté, but it wasn't foie gras, just regular livers. So I made a paté bruschetta on crostini, topped with smoked duck breast I'd found in my mystery box, melted Gouda and a light arugula salad. After those livers, I was ready for anything.

### **YOUR DARKEST THOUGHTS IN THE HEAT OF BATTLE?**

It happens so fast, you worry you're going to run out of time. They say "10 minutes are up!" and you think "No way, all I've done is chop an onion." It'd be so embarrassing to have them call time's up and you're not done. The biggest fear is that your great idea won't translate, it won't come out right.

### **YOUR WINNING DISHES?**

The third day, the American Kobe flatiron beef was so beautiful, I wanted to let its integrity shine. So I made a Cabernet risotto and laid the beef on top. For freshness I sautéed small slices of Brussels sprouts with late summer sweet corn and Spanish onions, which I ladled over the beef. My second beef dish featured chanterelle mushrooms lightly sauced with blue cheese.

### **WILL YOUR CONTEST CREATIONS BE FEATURED ON THE MENU AT DAYTON STREET GRILLE?**

I'm not sure duck liver would be popular, but we'll definitely do some plays on the beef dishes.

### **YOUR OVERALL APPROACH TO CUISINE THAT REIGNS SUPREME?**

I was born and raised in the San Francisco restaurant scene. I ended up at the California Culinary Academy and developed a real passion for doing fine cuisine. I like farm-fresh ingredients and keeping their integrity by not overpowering or oversaucing them. I was lucky; I started out in high-end restaurants in San Francisco where I could really be creative with plating and let the ingredients speak for themselves.

I've been here two years now. The local produce is great. There's a lot out there, if you're seasonally flexible. I feel lucky and privileged to be here, and my biggest gratification is that I have a busy restaurant.