

Banuve wins Cookery Competition at Hospitality and Tourism Festival

Fiji National University (FNU) student, Merewalesi Banuve was declared the winner of the top student chef competition after edging out 22 other competitors at the Hospitality and Tourism Festival special cookery competition this afternoon.

Participants consisted of students from FNU's College of Business, Hospitality and Tourism Studies (CBHTS), National Training and Productivity Centre (NTPC), Technical College of Fiji (TCF) and University of the South Pacific's Pacific TAFE.

The week-long festival organised by NTPC is currently being held at FNU's Namaka Campus in Nadi.

Banuve, 20, who is pursuing a Trade Diploma in Culinary Arts, said she was proud to win such a competition, especially when she was up against other talented student chefs.



Merewalesi Banuve preparing the ingredients for her dish during the competition.

Her winning dish was an intricate combination of 'stuffed pouched fish, kai and pineapple salsa, béchamel and coconut sauce, garlic butter octopus with dalo logs'.

Banuve said seafood had never been her strong suit, but she was happy to have participated in the challenge and declared the winner.

Hilton Fiji, Senior Sous Chef and Competition Judge, Freddy Movick said Banuve had stood out during the competition heats and was very consistent in the way she delivered her food "by blending tradition and modern styles of food preparation".

"She has got a very bright future ahead of her, as long as she constantly tries to improve on her abilities," he said.



Merewalesi Banuve with her winning seafood dish at the Hospitality and Tourism Festival.

Movick said the purpose of competitions like these was to find out "the right attitude in students".

"After the two-day competition, we the judges believe that the students need the right type of grooming from us in the industry. They know they have very little time left in their institutions before they are out into the industry."

Movick said food preparation aside; he was also impressed with the way the students minimised wastage in the kitchen by planning out their ingredients and reusing others.

"We in the industry not only deal with guest satisfaction but also costs. Every single waste is money. We are glad that these guys have been utilising all the ingredients appropriately with minimal wastage."

The festival also saw the conclusion of the bed-making competition, with 39-year-old Ana Kutauci declared the winner.

Kutauci, who is an NTPC Certificate in Housekeeping student, said she was happy with her performance as she had given her best during the competition to bag the winning trophy.

The Hospitality and Tourism Festival continues until Friday, 27 September and opens from 10am to 10pm. Entry is free to the general public.



Ana Kutauci, winner of the Hospitality and Tourism Festival's bed-making.