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**CONTACTS:** Melinda Eddleman, Associate Director of Media Relations, at [meddlem@delmar.edu](mailto:meddlem@delmar.edu) or 361-815-4111 (m) or Richard Guerrero, Jr., Media Relations Writer/Digital News Content Developer, at [rguerrerr20@delmar.edu](mailto:rguerrerr20@delmar.edu) or 361-944-0230 (m)

**ONLINE NEWSROOM:** [vikingnews.delmar.edu](http://vikingnews.delmar.edu)

## **She won a Golden Ticket! Del Mar College Baking/Pastry major Alyana Willingham is heading to World Food Championships in Indianapolis next month**

*Five DMC teams vied for top spot in four categories to advance to next level as competition heated up at Water's Edge Park Friday and Saturday with winners announced today*

(Corpus Christi, TX)–The heat not only rose weatherwise but also in the outdoor kitchens during the Texas Food Championship (TFC) at Water's Edge Park this weekend. Five Del Mar College (DMC) student teams comprising Culinary Arts Program or Baking/Pastry Program majors competed in four categories–burger, dessert, pasta (open category) and seafood–over a two-day period, hoping to win a Golden Ticket to move on to the World Food Championships in Indianapolis next month.

Del Mar College has been the lead supporter of the event.

During today's awards ceremony, TFC officials announced all the winners, including **Baking/Pastry major and Dessert Category solo competitor Alyana Willingham. On Friday, she prepared a lemon olive oil cake with lemon curd, Pistachio Creme Fraiche, blueberry compote, pistachio crumble and candied zest.** That cake won Willingham a Golden Ticket after competing against five other teams. She was coached by Department of Culinary Arts & Hospitality Management Baking/Pastry Instructor Bryan Carrizales.

"The competition was my very first, and I was very nervous leading up to start time, but then I started getting very excited," said Willingham. "Because the category had six teams overall, Del Mar College had more than a 30 percent chance of winning since I and another DMC student competed solo."

The second-year DMC student graduated from Calallen High School and plans to complete the college's Culinary Arts Program after finishing her Baking/Pastry training. She credits her grandmother and mother for inspiring her to pursue a career in the food industry as well as the late celebrity chef Anthony Bourdain.

Willingham hasn't figured out what she wants to prepare during the World Food Championships but says she has some time. "I haven't figured that out yet," she said, adding, "I have a couple of weeks to decide and practice."

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## **DEL MAR COLLEGE**

### **Texas Food Championship: She won a Golden Ticket - Alyana Willingham**

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During the award ceremony, DMC officials also announced that the five winners of the Texas Junior Chef Championship for high school-age competitors will receive scholarships to attend the college's Culinary Arts, Baking/Pastry and Hospitality Management Programs.

The Texas Food Championship attracted some 150 competitors, including home cooks and professional chefs from across the state, vying for their place in Indianapolis either as individuals or on a team. TFC officials noted that Team Texas will be headed by two-time World Food Championship winner Preston Nguyen as team captain. He won those titles while attending Dallas College and is now a chef in Arlington, Texas.

During this weekend's championship, judges evaluated each dish using the E.A.T.<sup>TM</sup> methodology – execution, appearance and taste. Those judges included Culinary Arts & Hospitality Management Department Interim Chair Lisa Pollakis during the BBQ! Chicken Category on Friday and DMC Regent David Loeb during yesterday's Texas Junior Chef Championship.

Of the department's showing and Golden Ticket win, Pollakis said, "We're incredibly proud of all our students representing Del Mar College and the Culinary Arts and Baking/Pastry Programs during the first Texas Food Championship here in Corpus Christi. These first- and second-year students stepped outside of their comfort zones and devoted many extra hours to prepare for the competition, creating outstanding dishes to compete alongside talented culinarians from across Texas."

Pollakis added, "The college is also grateful to our faculty and staff coaches whose mentorship, guidance and devotion helped students elevate their skills and performance to a very high level. This experience demonstrates the talent, determination and bright future of Del Mar College's students majoring in the culinary, baking and hospitality pathways."

In addition to Carrizales coaching the college's two Dessert Category competitors, DMC Executive Chef Matt Axtell coached the Burger and Pasta teams while Associate Professor of Culinary Arts Chef Israel "Izzy" Villanueva mentored the team competing in the Seafood Category.

The World Food Championships attract between 300 and 400 teams annually, including competitors from across the United States as well as those who have earned a Golden Ticket from nearly 40 countries. The "heat in the kitchen" for Del Mar College TFC winner Alyana Willingham turned up a few more degrees today as she plans and practices to become a "world champion."

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