

Minnesota Now (MPR) | Minnesota Now Shawn McKenzie, James Beard-nominated Pastry Chef, tells us what's for lunch 01GWMVQVGEJ99XRCH2ZXS48JZ6

CATHY WURZER: Four chefs and one pastry chef from the Twin Cities have been nominated by the prestigious James Beard Foundation for their James Beard Awards. Finalists will be announced tomorrow, March 29. It's a huge honor, so we wanted to catch up with the nominated chefs.

And since our show airs over the lunch hour, we thought we'd ask, well, what the heck? What's for lunch? Today, we're talking with Shawn McKenzie. Shawn is nominated for best pastry chef or baker. *Minnesota Now* welcomes Shawn. Shawn McKenzie, congratulations. How are you?

SHAWN MCKENZIE: Good. Thank you so much.

CATHY WURZER: You are the co-founder of Cafe Ceres in Minneapolis. You're the executive pastry chef at Rustica. How did you get involved in baking and pastries?

SHAWN MCKENZIE: Oh. Well, let's go back a bit. My father was a chef, and I used to work with him when he was at a senior center making lunches. And I was basically the head cookie maker, so that's kind of how it started. I was like 11 at the time.

CATHY WURZER: Wow. That's early. That's early. What did he teach you about baking? Do you remember some of the lessons that you took away?

SHAWN MCKENZIE: His thing was patience because you kind of want it right then and now. Like with savory food, you can have it relatively quickly depending on what you're making, but pastry does take a little bit of time. Even cookies, people think it's just one thing, and then it's done. But he definitely was just mixing, letting it sit, letting it be in the refrigerator so that it actually takes in all of the flavors, everything. So I remember that and that's kind of why I think I have a mini obsession with cookies.

CATHY WURZER: Favorite cookies? Do you have a favorite flavor?

SHAWN MCKENZIE: Well, I mean, it's right down the middle like everybody, but chocolate chip. At a young age, I was making it all the time, so I was always trying to perfect that like-- OK, the chips would stay moist and have that chocolaty feeling to it after it's been baked for days. You know what I mean? I always was obsessed with making sure it didn't taste like it was old and crusty.

CATHY WURZER: I have no background in baking at all. When I've attempted to bake, it's been horrible, so I admire what you do. I admire what you do to a great degree. When you go to a restaurant, is it hard to not judge the pastries that you're eating?

SHAWN MCKENZIE: Well, this is not going to be popular, but I tend not to order dessert or pastries. Sometimes, I have friends that are, hey. Let's go check out this place for breakfast. And if they're having a croissant, of course I'm going to try it. But for the most part, weirdly, I stay away from pastries.

CATHY WURZER: Why is that?

SHAWN It's just this obsession of-- I'm going to want to maybe match, or it will get in my brain about how they do it. And

MCKENZIE: I'm trying to stay in my lane and stick to what I do, so there's that. And then weirdly, I'm more attracted to eating savory than pastry. So a lot of times, I'll go crazy on the savory food. And then by that point, I'm not necessarily hungry for anything sweet.

CATHY Makes sense. It does make sense. Speaking of food, have you had lunch yet?

WURZER:

SHAWN I have had lunch. I did a scrounge. That's what my father used to call it. So we, over the weekend, had a pork loin

MCKENZIE: with a quinoa pilaf and some mushroom gravy, so that was my lunch today.

CATHY Well, good. I'm glad to hear you had lunch because the other four nominees-- not one of them had eaten much of

WURZER: anything all day when I talked to them, so I'm really, really happy that you had something to eat.

SHAWN I've learned the hard way. You got to stay taking care of yourself.

MCKENZIE:

CATHY You gotta. Exactly. That's the fuel, you know? So this is the first time that you've been in the James Beard

WURZER: spotlight. It's got to feel pretty good.

SHAWN Yeah. It's weird. I didn't even know. I mean, I guess I think maybe a lot of the nominees might have said the

MCKENZIE: same thing. You wake up, and then you're at work doing your job and someone's like, hey, congratulations. And you're like, what? What's this?

CATHY And how did you find out?

WURZER:

SHAWN A friend. Yeah. And then it was kind of like, ding, ding, ding. Your phone starts blowing up with other people,

MCKENZIE: people from way back like in Portland. I have people being like, hey. I saw that you got nominated. It was pretty nice.

CATHY How do you think the nomination might change things for you? Have you thought that through yet?

WURZER:

SHAWN I have not. I mean, I feel like for me, it's definitely an accomplishment. It feels pretty special. I do feel like I

MCKENZIE: wouldn't have gotten it without any of the people that I've worked with or worked for me, so it's also this kind of group-- all of us kind of did it together. So that feels really good, too. But I'm trying not to think of-- OK, what is this going to do? I guess I'm just trying to still take one step at a time of-- OK, I need to bake off cookies today.

CATHY Everybody that we've talked to has also talked about the team that's behind them that has really propelled them

WURZER: forward, so I'm not surprised you mentioned your team. I'm glad you did. What's the rest of the day look like? Kind of curious. How busy are you going to get later today?

SHAWN Well, for me, since it's cafe kind of setting, the day is starting to wind down, so I'm just going to make sure that

MCKENZIE: my orders are all in. I'm working on a little bit of costing. I'm going to check in with the-- we have a little savory program that we started at the Linden Hills Cafe Ceres, so I'm just going to check in with the chef about things we need to order and make sure we're on top of the breads. That's kind of the rest of my day.

CATHY All right. Well, I hope you enjoy whatever you're doing, and thank you. Congratulations again.

WURZER:

SHAWN Thank you so much. I really appreciate this.

MCKENZIE:

CATHY Shawn McKenzie is the co-founder of Cafe Ceres in Minneapolis, the executive pastry chef at Rustica. She's

WURZER: nominated for a James Beard Award in the category of best pastry chef or baker. The semifinalists will be announced tomorrow, as a matter of fact. Finalists will be awarded on June the 5th.