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## Second-ever CF Holiday Bake-Off brings tears of joy to a winner



**Most of the judges are seen here.**

**Story and Photos By Jeff M. Hardison © Dec. 9, 2015 @ 12:47 p.m.**

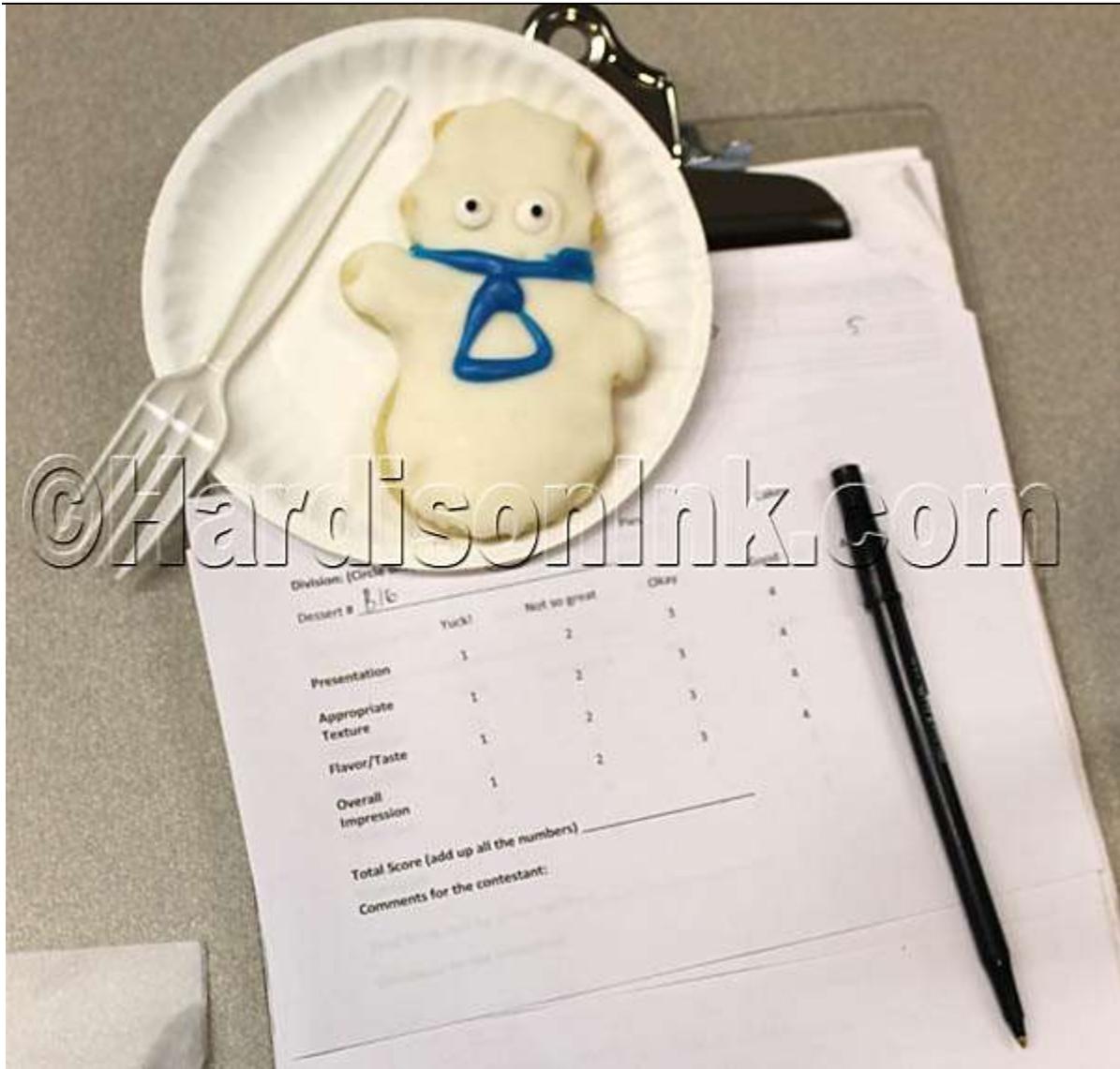
**Ocala** – About a dozen judges tasted and evaluated a scores of cookies, cakes and pies in a baked dessert contest conducted on the Ocala campus of the College of Central Florida on Thursday morning (Dec.8), and those very treats later added to the CF Holiday Party that afternoon.

The second-ever CF Holiday Bake-Off attracted many CF employees who were willing to compete with each other in the baked dessert competition.

Room 107 of the CF Ewers Century Center had table after table of homemade cakes, cookies and pies. The person who led the combined effort to bring the CF Holiday Bake-Off to fruition was Staci Biondini, manager of CF Marketing and Public Relations.

The scoring sheets showed the contest entrees were to be evaluated on “Presentation,” “Appropriate Texture,” “Flavor/Taste” and “Overall Impression.” In those four realms, there was a scale of one to five. So the highest score to be earned from one judge for one item was 20 points.

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Just so the judges were clear about what “1” through “5” meant, there were words next to each number. Those words from lowest to highest were “Yuck!”, “Not So Great,” “Okay,” “Good” and “Amazing.”

Judges were armed with forks, paper plates and napkins, as well as pens and the scoring sheets. Judges had access to water or coffee to cleanse their palates as they carefully checked each wonderful treat. There was not as much Christmas music playing in the background as the first year.

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**Decorating these cupcakes shows some of the art factor applied by bakers.**

By the way, if this happens next year it qualifies as a tradition that can be called the Third Annual CF Holiday Bake-Off, according to rules applied to such things by some journalists.

The set of judges included several from Chick-fil-A of Ocala, which includes an outlet near the CF campus. Another significant Ocala-based judge was from Signature Brands of Ocala. Signature brands began in 1951, when the Pioneer Decorating Co. was founded by Louise Jones Crawford and her brother Bobby Jones in Ocala. This company has clients like Betty Crocker and Paas.

There were at least two publishers in the mix of judges (including one who owns a daily online news website that focuses primarily on Levy, Dixie and Gilchrist counties; however coverage can be anywhere).

There was a judge from the Appleton Museum of Art, which is also in Ocala. There was at least one retired CF employee who served as a judge.

There was a judge from Cakes Come True - Donna Tackett Cake Design (where delicious custom cakes can be found in Marion County and the surrounding area).

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These Campfire Cookies had a little flickering battery-powered light and tiny kindling in the center.



Strawberries adorn part of this amazing cake.

And while most of the judges are noted, by being from here or there, there may have been some not grabbed quickly enough to say from whence they came.

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Yet the judges judged! Go judges! Once they completed the basic training instruction session, judges launched into the mission. It was an awesome sight!

The CF Holiday Bake-Off masterpieces served as the centerpiece in a magnificently decorated room for the CF Holiday Party, which was that afternoon. That is when and where the winning bakers were first announced.

A good time was had by all.



**Here is a cherry pie that was a contender.**

Biondini shared the results from the bake-off.

"It was close," Biondini said on Friday (Dec. 9), "with the top two to three in some categories being separated by tenths of a point. I also wanted to share that Lilianna, the winner in the pie category, came up to me after she learned she had won with tears in her eyes.

"She said this was her father's recipe," Biondini said. "She called her mother from the party."

## **WINNERS**

In the **CAKE** category, the winner is flourless chocolate cake with raspberry sauce made by Susan Dagg, staff assistant II, Printing and Postal Services.

In the **COOKIES AND BARS** category, the winner is Magic 7 Layer Bars made by Loren Carr, executive director of the XCEL-IT program.

In the **PIE** category, the winner is Chaavous Pecan Pie made by Lilianna Howard, Learning Lab School preschool teacher.