**U.S. PIZZA TEAM NATIONAL PIZZA TRIALS**

**Michael LaMarca of Master Pizza wins trip to Italy**

Chattanooga, Tennessee – U.S. Pizza Team and Mellow Mushroom Pizza Bakers in Downtown Chattanooga, Tennessee held the inaugural National Pizza Trials on Dec. 11 with the grand prize going to Michael LaMarca of Master Pizza in Cleveland, Ohio. LaMarca beat out 18 competitors. His Popeye Pizza is made with spinach, tomatoes, artichoke hearts, garlic butter sauce and balsamic glaze with four cheeses.

The first-place winner from the traditional culinary pizza competition wins a grand prize trip to Italy. Teams will compete in the World Pizza Championships in Parma, Italy in May 2015.

Second place in culinary was Dave Sommers of Mad Mushroom in West Lafayette, Indiana. Sommers created a creamy gorgonzola sauce topped with asparagus and seared beef filet, finished with a merlot sauce drizzle. Third place went to Ali Haider of 786 Degrees Wood Fired Pizza Company in Los Angeles, California. Haider cooked a Neapolitan-style pizza fusing Indian herbs and spices, secret Tikka masala Tandoori chicken, mango chutney, mozzarella, sweet peppers, fresh cilantro and Himalayan sea salt.

Other competitors included: Chris Mallon of Five Points Pizza in Nashville; Stan Miller of World Famous Piezons Pizza in Fulton, Mississippi; Greg Spaulding of Puccini’s Smiling Teeth in Lexington, Kentucky; Bradley Corbin of Sloopy’s Sports Café in Lakeside, Ohio; Jason Samosky of Samosky’s Homestyle Pizzeria in Cleveland, Ohio; Ashley Weller, Austin Russel and Michael Amheiser of Pizza Dock in Fredericktown, Ohio; Frank Baird, Veronic Obenour, Carmen Baird and Ross Croucher of Francko’s at Phuel Café in Cleveland; Brian Scot of Community Pie in Chattanooga, Tennessee; and Jane Mines of Nima’s Pizza and More in Gassville, Arkansas

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In pizza acrobatics, Dave Sommers of Mad Mushroom also took home two first-place prizes for fastest box folding (25 seconds) and fastest pizza (37 seconds). Coming in second in fastest box folding was Michael LaMarca of Master Pizza (30 seconds). Third was Stan Miller of World Famous Piezons Pizza (32 seconds).

Finishing second in fastest pizza was Rick Wheeler of Mad Mushroom (43 seconds) and the third-place competitor was Stan Miller of World Famous Piezons Pizza (62 seconds).

In largest dough stretch, two competitors tied for first. Dylan Morris of Alan’s Stone Baked the Pizza and Brian Scott of Community Pie in Chattanooga, Tennessee both recorded 31.375. After a stretch-off, Morris took top honors. The third-place winner was Rick Wheeler of Mad Mushroom pizza (31.125 inches).

All the winners are accepted into the U.S. Pizza Team and received a plaque. First- place winners in acrobatics also won an official Throw Dough from the U.S. Pizza Team.

**Flour for the National Pizza Trials was provided by Grain Craft.**

The U.S. Pizza Team consists of expert pizza makers and dough-spinning acrobatic performers from pizza restaurants across the United States. The squad won second place in Individual Free Style in 2014 and first place in the Team Acrobatics World Championship in Italy in 2011. PMQ Pizza Magazine, the business trade publication for the pizza restaurant industry, created the U.S. Pizza Team in 2000. The US Pizza Team is sponsored by Grain Craft, California Milk Advisory Board, Gordon Food Service, LaNova, Paradise Tomato Kitchens, Bag Solutions, Fontanini Meats, Lillsun, Marsal and Sons, Univex, PizzaInsurance.com and Presto Foods.

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