

HAWAII/PACIFIC ISLANDS REGIONAL YOUNG SOMMELIER COMPETITION

And Then There Were Two

By Judith Kellogg

Hawaii/Pacific Islands Chargée de Presse Provinciale

SPRING IS A TIME TO CELEBRATE NEW beginnings. For Mondiale members of the Hawaii/Pacific Islands region, it was the season to celebrate the gifted young people who will be looking after their futures. On April 6, at the Halekulani Hotel, two of the region's rising stars competed for the title of Best Young Sommelier. Both Professionnel du Vin Patrick Okubo and David Castleberry passed a rigorous screening to reach this level of competition.

Hawaii is fortunate to have a wealth of seasoned wine experts, and the best of the best served as judges. The panel was comprised of Master Sommelier Chuck Furuya, Master Sommelier Roberto Viernes (silver-medal winner of the 2002 national Young Sommelier competition); Mark Shisido, beverage director of Alan Wong restaurants; and Kevin Toyama, sommelier at La Mer restaurant. These professionals did far more than simply judge. Believing both contestants to be enormously talented, they also relished the opportunity to mentor and inspire the next generation of sommeliers.

Master Sommelier Furuya, who had encountered both young men at last year's event, was impressed by the advancement in their wine knowledge over the past twelve months. However, only one winner could be chosen, and Professionnel du Vin Okubo repeated his victory from the previous year. This accomplishment qualified him to compete in the national competition in Sonoma.

Professionnel du Vin Okubo is a partner at Formaggio, a popular gourmet restaurant and wine bar in Honolulu and Kailua. He wasted no time in rising to the top, earning the rank of Advanced Sommelier from Court of Master Sommeliers in 2008. He plans to sit for the Master Sommelier exam in early 2010.

Following the competition, Professionnel du Vin Okubo and Mr. Castleberry were treated to a beautiful luncheon at Orchids in the Halekulani Hotel, with the ocean and Diamond Head serving as a magnificent backdrop. Special thanks go to Echanson Provincial David Gochros for his excellent orchestration of the event, and to Mr. Toyama, who, in addition to judging, procured the lovely venue and set up before the contest. ☒



(Above) Judge Mark Shisido, winner Professionnel du Vin Patrick Okubo, Judge/Master Sommelier Chuck Furuya, competitor David Castleberry, Judge/Master Sommelier Roberto Viernes and Judge Kevin Toyama.



(Left) Winner Professionnel du Vin Patrick Okubo and Echanson Provincial David Gochros.



(Right) Competitor David Castleberry.

(Below) H/PI regional officers and Young Sommelier contestants.

