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COMCAST SPECTACOR TO HOLD 1ST CULINARY INNOVATION SUMMIT

Top culinary experts will gather in Chicago this month for Comcast Spectacor's first Culinary Innovation Summit, which officials say will change the way fans dine at its managed properties.

There, Philadelphia-area chefs are among those competing to create a winning dish that could potentially make its way into the menus of those 300-plus properties.

Spectra by Comcast Spectacor on Aug. 8-11 will hold its Culinary Innovation Summit in Chicago that will tackle changes in the food and hospitality industries, with discussions that include the latest trends, techniques and implementation of innovative concepts.

Spectra is a full-service hospitality firm and a fully-owned division of Comcast NBCUniversal.

The goal, with the summit, is to bring together top innovators and influencers to create signature dishes to enhance the guest experience across Spectra's 300-plus properties, according to Scott Swiger, vice president of culinary excellence.

In Greater Philadelphia, Spectra provides venue management, food services and hospitality and partnerships to Talen Energy Center, Liacouras Center by Temple University, Sun National Bank Center, Atlantic City Convention Center and Boardwalk Hall.

Spectra wants to change the way guests dine at its managed properties, and the summit is designed to "create opportunities for our experts to collaborate and learn from each other as they create new offerings," Swiger said.

Bucks County firm scores knockout with Mayweather-McGregor pay-per-view rights
Comcast Spectacor in June this year acquired Philadelphia-based catering company, Brûlée Catering, to supplement its own catering offerings with premium services and off-premise catering.

Chef Jean-Marie Lacroix of Brûlée will attend the Culinary Innovation Summit as a motivational speaker.

"His advice can be applied to a variety styles of kitchens that Spectra operates," Swiger said.

The location of the summit, Chicago, also benefits attendees and Spectra, since it's centrally located and it's where US Foods is headquartered.

"US Foods is one of our key partners and this summit gives us the opportunity to bring together our culinary innovators to collaborate directly with US Food's product development team in their test kitchen," Swiger said.

Chef competition

The summit will include a competition among 11 chefs working in properties managed by Spectra.

Two executive chefs will represent the Philadelphia region:

Elizabeth Barlow from the Talen Energy Center in Chester, Delaware County

George Fisher from the Atlantic City Convention Center and Boardwalk Hall

The chefs will compete and create a dish that could potentially make it onto the menus of Spectra-managed venues across the United States and Canada.

"We hope to walk out of this event with six new and exciting menu items that can be introduced at our venues across the country," Spectra's Swiger said.

About 11 chefs were chosen to represent the diverse mix of segments Spectra operates in — stadiums, arenas, convention centers, casinos and cultural attractions.

"We gathered input from regional executive chefs and Spectra's field leadership team to identify the innovators and influencers within each segment," Swiger said.

Two highlights from the Culinary Innovation Summit

Aug. 9: The Knowledge Exchange

Attendees will hear the latest in culinary and marketplace trends, see and test new products; build relationships with culinary, packaging and equipment sponsors; and drive innovation and applicability within Spectra's different business segments.

Spectra is hosting the event in partnership with broad line distributor, US Foods.

Select manufacturer partners, representing products like spice blends and rubs, fire braised meats, specialty sauces and condiments, burgers, flatbreads and modernized versions of traditional stadium favorites, will also take part.

Aug. 10: Culinary Innovation Challenge

The chefs will be divided into three teams, which must create two "breakthrough" concepts and recipes.

Teams will have one hour to plan and consult with the product experts and food purveyors on site.

Each team will present their final ideas to a panel of judges for a preliminary consult before heading into the kitchen.

The chefs have 90 minutes of open kitchen time to perfect their dishes.

After presenting to the judges panel, which includes a group tasting, only one winner will be crowned.

Each new dish, however, will have the potential to be incorporated into future menus at Spectra-managed properties.