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## **Bonita Unified's San Dimas High ProStart Culinary Team Makes History with Trip to Nationals**

**SAN DIMAS/LA VERNE** – The San Dimas High School ProStart culinary program will represent the state of California at the National ProStart Invitational – to be held May 2-4 in Baltimore – after its five-student “Let Them Cook” culinary team plated a nearly flawless three-course meal at the California Restaurant Foundation’s CA ProStart Cup, taking the top prize and making history for the school and Bonita Unified School District.

This is the third year in a row that a Bonita Unified school has been awarded the title of “Team California,” after the Bonita High School ProStart culinary team took first place in the 2024 CA ProStart Cup and the San Dimas ProStart management team did the same in 2023.

“This is a monumental achievement. Every long hour, late night, and sacrifice has paid off,” San Dimas ProStart teacher Nick Brandler said. “I am incredibly proud of all our teams and couldn’t have asked for a better group to share this journey with. Through it all, we became more than a team, we’re a family.”

San Dimas’ victory sealed the District’s most successful year at the state competition, with Bonita High School’s defending champion culinary team taking third place and Bonita’s management team placing second. All schools that finish in the top five of either competition receive college scholarships.

The San Dimas menu featured a Chilean seabass appetizer, a lamb strip loin with truffle pomme puree entrée, and coconut mousse encased in a tempered chocolate shell as dessert. San Dimas senior and “Let Them Cook” team captain Kaila Khoury scoured the internet to find inspiration for her menu.

“Last year we finished in fourth place due to a small error during our run, which most likely cost us a podium spot. It was somewhat disappointing knowing we came so close. This year I was returning as captain, so I went out and found the coolest dessert ever on Pinterest for inspiration. That’s how our menu started,” Khoury said. “I’m beyond excited to go to Nationals. We put our minds together and worked as a team. I am very proud of our team and program!”

Brandler knew something special was brewing when Khoury’s team – including San Dimas High seniors Emma Johns, Emily Robertson, and Hellen Marcillo, and junior Kyle Yamate – began testing menu ideas.

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“By January, we realized we had something special,” Brandler said. “The dishes were among the best I’d ever seen in competition, and their teamwork, safety, sanitation, knife skills, cooking techniques, and workflow were nearly flawless. That’s when we made the decision: we were going for gold.”

San Dimas High’s second culinary team placed 10th in the Cup, securing top 10 spots for both teams.

Bonita High’s culinary team – led by returning captain, senior Charli Padilla – valiantly defended their title, despite narrowing the team down to just three members, including seniors Layla Spana and Landon Thompson, to focus on efficiency and skill. Despite having no room for error and surviving a scary moment when Thompson suffered a severe injury to his right index finger, Bonita took its second consecutive top three finish. A second Bonita High culinary team finished in 12th place.

“Our students are what makes our programs so special,” Bonita High ProStart teacher Laurie Brandler said. “They gave it their all for months, truly showcasing their grit, dedication, skill and love for this industry. We are so excited to watch these future industry leaders in their hospitality journey and can’t wait to see what they’ll do next.”

For Nick and Laurie Brandler – Bonita Unified’s husband-and-wife ProStart instructors – the finest moment may have been seeing their daughter, Bonita High sophomore Abby Brandler, along with Bonita senior Bella Yanez, take second place in the management division for their Champion’s Chomps concept – a fast casual restaurant with a nutritious and flavorful menu.

Bonita High senior Nathan Ebel also took second place in the Wienerschnitzel Dress Your Dog competition, and fourth place in the Loaded Idaho Baked Potato competition.

### PHOTOS:

**BUSD\_PROSTARTCUP1:** The San Dimas High School “Let Them Cook” culinary team, led by San Dimas senior and team captain Kaila Khoury (front, middle) and San Dimas culinary instructor Nick Brandler (back row), celebrate their first-place win at the California Restaurant Foundation’s CA ProStart Cup.

**BUSD\_PROSTARTCUP2:** Bonita High School seniors Landon Thompson and Charli Padilla prepare their work station during the CA ProStart Cup in February.

**BUSD\_PROSTARTCUP3:** Bonita High sophomore Abby Brandler (left) and senior Bella Yanez (right) pitch their fast casual restaurant, Champion Chomps, during the CA ProStart Cup. The pair took second place in the Cup’s Management competition. Abby Brandler is the daughter of San Dimas High ProStart instructor Nick Brandler and Bonita High ProStart instructor Laurie Brandler.

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