

# Costeaux, Bear Republic win high honors at Harvest Fair

## Two local eateries take home 40 awards combined

By MATTHEW HALL  
Staff Writer

On September 30, the Sonoma County Harvest Fair will host its annual awards night, and several Healdsburg restaurants will be among the most prolific winners.

Costeaux Bakery will receive two of the fair's highest honors taking Best of Show in the French Bread and Specialty categories. Bear Republic will receive 19 awards including four double gold.

The Harvest Fair used a Danish judging system. Each item is ranked independently and awarded a bronze, silver or gold ranking by each judge on the tasting panel. Any item that receives a gold ranking from all its judges is awarded a double gold. All double gold items in a category are gathered at the end of the day and an overall best of show is determined.

Judges are provided with appropriate vehicles for tasting entries to simulate the restaurant experience. Anne Vercelli, the

Fair's Professional Food Judging Coordinator, said she provided greens for the salad dressings, chips for salsa, cooked pasta for pasta sauce, ice cream for chocolate sauce and chicken for barbecue sauces. "It's done the real life way the customer will taste the product," she said.

Will Seppi is Costeaux's general manager and grew up in the bakery after his parents purchased the Costeaux business in May of 1981. They entered the Harvest Fair in October of 1981 and won the bread competition with a sourdough roll that they still make today.

Costeaux won Best of Show for their French Country loaf. Seppi described it as "a hearty two pound loaf, made with sourdough, whole wheat and rye." Seppi said his father developed the loaf with several customers.

A multigrain loaf took best of show in the specialty category. Seppi said the bakery had been producing the multigrain loaf for about four months, also at the request of customers. Costeaux produces the bread in a loaf, roll and batard.

Seppi has been managing Costeaux for about two years. He grew up in Healdsburg



**TASTY** ♦ Costeaux baker Ramon Santana prepares apricot logs at the company's Healdsburg bakery.

PHOTO BY MATTHEW HALL

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Seppi has been managing Costeaux for about two years. He grew up in Healdsburg and eventually went to the East Coast for college. After returning to the Bay Area as an accountant he recently returned to the family businesses.

"It's nice to be recognized for the products that we are making," he said. "For us it's bread that we're making day in and day out, that's available in our retail store. For us to be able to share that is

great."

"It really is a big, big win. To win both is just a fabulous and they also brought home seven golds," said Vercelli.

Head chef Shawn Thomas of Bear Republic credited his Southern-inspired dishes for the restaurant's success. Bear Republic won double golds for a hot soup and three sauces.

Thomas described the double gold winning She Crab Soup as the Southern staple. "We make it with sherry and it's quite unique and quite good," he said. The Bear's Carolina-style mustard barbecue sauce also took a double gold. Thomas said the sauce is

served with pulled pork and the combined dish was the first pulled pork dish in the area.

Thomas was particularly proud of the award for his Jamaican jerk sauce. Thomas said the sauce was very labor intensive but worth the work. The chef combines vinegar, green onions, molasses and a secret spice blend, reduces the sauce by about a third before serving it on the Jamaican hamburger.

The final double gold recipient was the restaurant's garlic vinaigrette salad dressing, made with whole roasted garlic and olive oil. Thomas said

the dressing was a standard option available at the restaurant.

Thomas grew up in the Healdsburg area before moving to Charleston South Carolina to become a chef. He operated his own catering business and worked in local restaurants before returning to Healdsburg and bringing his Southern dishes to the Bear.

Thomas re-enters some dishes every year, like his Fried Green Tomatoes, to showcase the unique nature of Southern cooking.

The Bear, a microbrewery with several award winning

beers, took a silver for its wine list. "The other amazing thing is, we're a beer place, and got a silver for our wine list."

Thomas said all the items served in the fair competition are identical to those served in the restaurant. He took samples of his sauces from batches already prepared at the Bear and prepares all his entrees in the restaurant's kitchen. "What you get at the fair is what you get at the restaurant," he said.

Vercelli said the winners really deserved praise. "They've worked so hard and come out so meritorious," she said.

Other Healdsburg area winners included Hoffman House Café, Michel-Schlumberger, Nit's Creations Thai Catering, River Rock Casino, Terra Sonoma Food Co. and diVine Pizza Co.

Tickets are available for the Awards Night Gala from the Fairgrounds Administration Office at 1350 Bennett Valley Rd., Santa Rosa or online at [www.harvestfair.org](http://www.harvestfair.org). The \$65 tickets provide the opportunity to taste the silver and gold foods along with samples from the over 900 wine entries.