

# Sanjay savours best chef win

By Amanda Dale

A chef from Sri Lanka yesterday scooped the title of 'Bermuda's Best Chef' at the hotel where he works as a senior chef-de-partie.

Sanjay Leeme was on home-ground at the Fairmont Southampton Princess in the cook-off to determine the Island's top chef. On his fourth and final attempt, the Ocean Club chef won the Escoffier Cup.

Mr. Leeme has entered the competition three times before, and has reached the final once previously. This year however was his last attempt, as he claims it is "now time for younger chefs to compete".

Mr. Leeme, 34, specialises in French cuisine but incorporated Oriental and Fusion styles into his final presentation. His dish consisted of a medallion of beef encrusted with peanut and sesame, with a mango curry sauce and seafood satay and sweet soya sauce. He also produced some 'surf and turf' accompanied with Golden egg sauce, chayote Asian pear relish and a kimbal of potato and vegetables.

"These four finalists were the best so I am very happy to have been chosen," said Mr. Leeme. "It is wonderful to win this cup, particularly as this is my last year in the competition.

"I am very proud to be a chef," he added, thanking the Fairmont Southampton sous chefs and senior executive sous chef, Michael Scott, for their support and guidance over the years.

In addition to his trophy and the kudos of being voted 'Bermuda's Best Chef', Mr. Leeme gets to enjoy an all-expenses paid trip to New York City as his prize.

The runner-up to the title was Timothy Palmer, a chef-de-partie at the Fairmont Southampton's Italian restaurant Bacci. Rajander Singh Bhandari, a sous chef at Café Coco, achieved third place while his colleague, chef-de-partie Michael Gomes, came in fourth.

The finalists at the fifth annual Gourmet Getaway event were picked from 16 culinary contestants. The final tasked them with creating a dish from beef tenderloin in 40 minutes.



**Cooking on gas:** Finalist Michael Gomes oils up the frying pans during the Escoffier Cup finals yesterday during the 2008 Gourmet Getaway at the Fairmont Southampton.

*Photo Chris Burville*

Cooking in a specially-designed dual kitchen at the Gourmet Getaway Viking Village, they were judged on taste, presentation, hygiene, complexity and ingredient compatibility. This year's judges were local chef and cookbook author Fred Ming and Vernon Pemberton and Leo Betschart of the Bermuda Chef Association.

The Gourmet Getaway was hosted by Rahman 'Rock' Harper, winner of Gordon Ramsey's FOX TV series 'Hell's Kitchen'. Mr. Harper told *The Royal Gazette*: "The Escoffier Cup has been wonderful. There was a great mix of talent and creativity from the chefs, and the energy was like nothing else. It's been very enjoyable."