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SOUTHWEST FLORIDA
ENTERTAINMENT

FOOD FIGHT

Roland vs. Mereday

2 Naples chefs to battle at Taste of Collier Top Chef

11 a.m. - 4 p.m. Sunday ■ \$5 ■ At Bayfront ■ Story on Page 14F

By Chris Silk
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It might not be the “Rumble in the Jungle” or the “Thrilla in Manila.”

But Naples will see its own heavyweight title bout between two men in their prime Sunday when chefs Brian Roland of Crave Culinaire and Charles Mereday of Mereday’s Fine Dining sharpen their knives and go slice-for-slice at 2:30 p.m. Sunday in the battle to determine the best man under a toque in the tropics.

TALE OF THE TOQUE

BRIAN ROLAND



Age: 35
Business: Now running personal catering service Crave Culinaire; former executive chef at Cru and M Waterfront Grille
Favorite ingredient: Sea salt
Must-have kitchen tool: A thermal circulator, allowing him to cook food at precise times and/or temperatures.

It’s being billed as Top Chef for Collier County, but in reality, it’s just one more of the events on tap during the 2015 edition of Taste of Collier,

the long-running food festival that runs 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Bayfront, near the corner of U.S. 41 East and Goodlette-Frank Road near downtown Naples.

Both Roland and Mereday insist they’re “just good friends doing this for a good cause.”

Indeed, when being interviewed after a photo shoot, the pair didn’t even know the format for the battle or if they’d be able to bring assistants, special ingredients (sea salt for Roland) or even, in Mereday’s case, his trusty Misono cooking knife.

They found out later. So did we. It’s basically “Iron Chef” with a few more ingredients.

Each participant gets a list of items, labeled here a “mystery basket,” and one hour to prepare one dish. Neither Roland nor Mereday may prepare anything that appears on the



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID ALBERS/STAFF

2 NAPLES CHEFS TO BATTLE AT TASTE OF COLLIER TOP CHEF

IF YOU GO | TASTE OF COLLIER 2015

What: Food festival with 30-plus vendors, demonstrations, live music, ice sculpting, wine garden
When: 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday
Where: Bayfront, near U.S. 41 East and Goodlette-Frank Road
Cost: \$5; buy online at tasteofcollier.com. Food/beverage items must be purchased with tickets, available in sheets of 10 (1 ticket equals \$1).
Parking: Because of construction at the former Grand Central Station property, off-site parking (\$5) is at Goodlette Commons, 850 Goodlette-Frank Road (opposite Seventh Avenue North), with a shuttle bus to the site.
Information: tasteofcollier.com
Forecast: Sunny and 89 degrees (Wear sunscreen!)



menus at their own restaurants, although the food can be anything — appetizer, entrée, dessert, etc.

Charles Mereday has been everywhere in Southwest Florida since opening his namesake restaurant at Naples Bay Resort in July 2013. Alto Jazz Kitchen opened in January 2014 at Bayfront, with Mereday’s Brasserie opening at Coconut Point in September. Just this month, Mereday’s (meredaysnaples.com) was tagged in a Condé Nast Traveler article naming Naples as one of “America’s Best Food Cities.”

Neapolitans can get a taste of Mereday’s cuisine at the Alto Jazz Kitchen booth at Taste of Collier. Stop by for Mereday’s signature gumbo, which he described as a mouthwatering mix of that Southern must-have okra, along with the obligatory ham hocks, chicken and andouille sausage. Roland’s Crave Culinaire won’t be in attendance, although he has participated in past years.

As for the competition, Mereday declined to make a prediction, other than “there’s going to be some good food that comes out of it!”

“(Taste of Collier) is a great event that brings the community together,” Mereday said. “Come meet the chefs and sample some of the cuisine.”

“(Taste of Collier) is a great event that brings the community together,” Mereday said. “Come meet the chefs and sample some of the cuisine.”

Roland, the former executive chef at Bell Tower hot-spot Cru and M Waterfront Grille, now runs Crave Culinaire (craveculinaire.com). More than a catering company, the firm creates

TALE OF THE TOQUE

CHARLES MEREDAY



Age: 41
Background: Johnson & Wales graduate with 20 years of experience. Currently appearing on television as well as operating Mereday’s Fine Dining, Alto Jazz Kitchen, Mereday’s Brasserie
Favorite ingredient: Any vegetable
Must-have kitchen tool: His trusty Misono, a Japanese-style kitchen knife.

See FIGHT, 27F

FIGHT
from 15F

“cuisine experiences.” Roland comes into the competition with prior experience as well, having competed in several previous “Iron Chef”-style competitions.

“It’s going to be a lot of fun,” Roland said. “Charles and I are going to put on a great show.”

Like Mereday, Roland declined to make a prediction on the outcome, but did confide that “deep down inside, we would both like to win!”

A partial listing of the restaurants scheduled to participate includes: Agave Bar & Grill, Alto Live Jazz Kitchen, AZN, Azian Cuizine, Bayfront Inn, Beefstro’s, Beaugard’s Homemade Ice Cream, Captain & Krewe Seafood Market & Rawbar, Edible Arrangements, EJ’s Bayfront Café, El Rincon de Mexico, Greek Gourmet, Marker 8.5 Goodland Yacht Club, South Street and St. Matthew’s House Catering.

Other attractions include food trucks, ice sculpting and food demonstrations with free samples. For adults of legal drinking age in search of shade, there’s the



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID ALBERS/STAFF

Chef Brian Roland, of Crave Culinaire, left, and chef Charles Mereday, of Mereday’s Fine Dining, Alto Live Jazz Kitchen and Mereday’s Brasserie, will battle it out in a friendly cooking competition at this year’s Taste of Collier Top Chef.

Copa Di Vino Wine Garden.

Festival admission is \$5; purchase online at tasteofcollier.com. Food/beverage items must be purchased with tickets, available in sheets of 10 (1 ticket equals \$1). Alcoholic beverages not included in price of admission. Because of construction at the former Grand Central

Station property, off-site parking (\$5) is at Goodlette Commons, 850 Goodlette-Frank Road (opposite Seventh Avenue North), with a shuttle bus to the site. Proceeds benefit St. Matthew’s House, the Heil Luthringer Foundation, the American Culinary Federation Caxambas Chapter and the local ProStart Culinary Arts Programs.

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4 Supporting Women: Ages 16-30, 3 Principal Men: (2) Ages 20-30,
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More information under “Get Involved” at www.naplesplayers.org