Delicious ending for Vineland contest

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VINELAND — Victory isn’t always sweet. Sometimes, it’s garlicky with a sharp, peppery sting.

The Tedesco family savored all those flavors and some self-satisfaction Saturday afternoon as their entry in Landis MarketPlace’s inaugural Sandwich of the Year contest was judged the best among eight specialty creations.

The Romano Chicken Shooter came out of the kitchen of Safeway Fresh Foods on Mill Road. The sandwich incorporated “cherry shooters,” a spicy delicatessen favorite the family created in the 1990s.

Brothers Frank and Sam Tedesco, who cooked with their mother Anna, accepted the trophy from Gary Holloway, manager of the city-supported market on Landis Avenue.

“It was a lot of fun,” Sam Tedesco said. “We have to thank our team. We had a team of about 15. Everyone really put their heads together.”

The sandwich will be offered at one or more MarketPlace food stands for the rest of the year. Two food stands, Las Lomas and Luciano’s FreshMarket, have been selling all eight sandwich creations since early January to whet interest in Saturday’s showdown.

Besides being tasty and creative, all the sandwiches that made the final round of the contest had another key criterion to meet. All had to be evocative of Vineland, current and historical, which led to heavy use of broccoli rabe (the farming industry), and poultry meat or eggs (once a huge business here).
Donata Dalesandro, one of the six judges, said it was difficult to suspend one’s own taste preferences to focus on how well each creation suggested “Vineland.”

The deliberations were confidential, lengthy and animated. Tabulations were not released.

“This was very, very close,” Hollway said.

The Tedesco brothers bought Safeway Freezer Storage on Mill Road in late 2009. The food business is a new side venture this year, Frank Tedesco said.

“We’re submitting it just to advertise our cherry hot shots,” he said as four sample sandwiches were assembled. The “Romano” in the title was for Vineland Mayor Robert Romano, one of the contest’s judges.

The sandwiches were presented separately to the judging dais. The judges took turns stating how an entry struck them before the next one was served.

The Romano Chicken Shooter was the third up.

"First of all, I love the name," Romano joked.

“It’s amazing how you get so many flavors coming out of one sandwich,” judge Jose Velez said.

Judge Diane Holtaway, associate director of the Rutgers University Food Innovation Center in Bridgeton, said lunch trucks at the school’s New Brunswick campus have "amazing sandwiches" and the chicken shooter should join the menu.

"I think you need to bring this into City Hall every day," said Kevin Kirchner, the city’s director of licenses and inspections.

Vinelander John Platanella Jr., a pharmacist, had strong hopes of winning with his Broccoli Rabe Chicken Cheesesteak. On an Italian
roll, he melted provolone over rabe and chicken cutlet with measures of olive oil, garlic, salt and pepper.

"I love to cook when I’m off," Platanella said. He’s been making the sandwich for more than a year.

The review of judges suggested Platanella might be right.

“Look out Philadelphia cheesesteak,” judge and chef John Knerr said. “This is the real deal cheesesteak. This should be the official cheesesteak of Vineland.”

Vinelanders Ron Gorgo and Pearl Giordano, president of Limpert Bros., had two of the more out-of-the-box sandwiches.

Gorgo, president of the Newfield Sportsman’s Club, based his Gorgo’s Spicy Gobbler Parm sandwich around the meat of the wild turkey that he hunts.

“People have misconceptions about wild turkey, that they are not good to eat,” Gorgo said.

Gorgo, who used to “sharpen his skills” at his grandmother’s restaurant in Newfield, said the breast meat makes an incredible cutlet.

“And it combines utilizing what you kill” with what you eat, he said. “And you are having a fun time out with friends hunting and you have a fun time cooking it for them.”

Giordano entered the Sweet ‘n Fluffy Eggplant Pollo. Perhaps the ingredient that most jumped out was Marshmallow Fluff, which is Limpert Bros.’ signature product. Although Fluff is most associated with ice cream, the company president keeps finding new ways to use it.

“I’m excited," Giordano said. “I just like the community to come out. And it allows you to showcase a product. It is not just for ice cream.”

Before the winner was selected, Giordano said it didn’t matter who was announced winner. “I’m standing with a group of winners,” she said.