

MINNESOTA CULTIVATED WildRice COUNCIL

4630 Churchill Street, #1, St. Paul, MN 55126 • Phone: 651.638.1955 • Fax: 651.638.0756 • wr@mnwildrice.org • www.mnwildrice.org

FOOD EDITORS RELEASE

Contact: Beth C. W. Nelson, President; Chelsea Russell, Communication Director

Sister Team Competes at World Food Championships

After winning back-to-back People's Choice awards in the Minnesota Cultivated Wild Rice Council's (MCWRC) 'Get Wild with Wild Rice' recipe contest, Michigan resident, Laura Kurella, was on her way to the 2023 World Food Championships (WFC) with a "Golden Ticket." Enlisting the help of her sisters Linda Okamura, Margaret Tierney, and Diane Slusarczyk, Laura dedicated their efforts to departed family members.



L to R: Linda Okamura, Laura Kurella, Margaret Tierney, Diane Slusarczyk.

Laura, a self-taught home cook, exclaimed, "Thank you, Lord!" when she learned she won. Competing at the WFC for the first time in 2015, Laura finds it informative, entertaining, and invigorating. "It's fast-paced and high stakes, so it definitely requires you bring your 'A' game!" She won her way into the WFC four times but was not able to compete again until this fall. Laura was excited to return to the global "heat."

Recently losing three siblings in almost as many years, Laura asked her remaining sisters to assist her. "It was nice to have an uplifting reason to be together." Winning MCWRC's 2023 "Golden Ticket" with her *Wild Rice Beer Bread & Maple Spread* recipe, she noted, "Everyone who has tasted it seems to moan!" Slotted in the WFC's Soup category, Laura needed to develop a signature slant on a classic soup.

Choosing to add a "fantasy" infusion to French onion soup, Laura adapted her award-winning wild rice bread recipe to further elevate her soup's flavorful fantasy build. "I sourced the finest Wagyu, bison, and farm-fresh onions to make it totally from scratch and enlisted a bubble waffle iron to bake the wild rice bread fresh!" Layering her wild rice bread with Gruyere, onion soup, Provolone, and more wild rice bread, she finished with aged Parmesan, Mozzarella pearls, a petite skewer of Wagyu filet medallions, and petite, crispy-thin onion rings nesting a buttery Morel crowned in 24K gold. Describing the WFC as loud, chaotic, uplifting, and festive, Laura said it required lots of planning and expense. "The WFC provides an electric home-grade stove and microwave, some pans, but very little else."

"You must pack well, cook fast, and be able to walk your entry to the judges table in under 1.5 hours' time." Making everything from scratch is time-consuming, but Laura said it was key to elevating flavor. "That and amazingly-flavorful ingredients like Minnesota wild rice and quality, top shelf ingredients." Receiving a perfect score (40) in Execution, a perfect score (40) in Appearance, an almost perfect score (39) in Taste, Laura's Overall Score totaled a 98.75, which landed her in a multi-competitor tie.

"I was selected to go head-to-head against another competitor in the 'Bite Club,' which gave the public the option of voting to advance someone into the finals." Serving one hundred paying guests over four hours' time, Laura said it was non-stop from beginning to end. "The Bite Club was intense, demanding continual cooking, plating, and serving, but the public served up many uplifting comments which helped keep us energized throughout that long-time-on-your-feet afternoon." Though not advancing into the finals, Laura and her sisters left feeling like winners. "Seeing that we scored higher than previous champions, restaurateurs, and even professional chefs was quite uplifting. After all, we're self-taught home cooks, and in our golden years at that! To be out running with these 'big dogs' in Dallas, and scoring in the top half of this globally polished and professional pack was a feat, but the best prize was that God gifted me with the chance to share this incredible experience with my siblings. In my book, that's priceless!"

A “home” version of Laura’s soup that is deliciously less complex than her recipe’s WFC red carpet debut:

Kurella’s Fantasy French Onion Soup

SOUP

- 3 tbsp unsalted butter
- 5 large yellow onions, thinly sliced
- 1 tsp unrefined sea salt
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- ½ cup dry white wine
- 2 tbsp sherry
- 2 cups beef bone broth
- 2 cups chicken bone broth
- 1 tsp Worcestershire sauce
- 2 sprigs fresh thyme
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 tsp freshly ground black pepper, divided
- 1 tsp red wine vinegar

WILD RICE BREAD BALLS

- 1 cup cooked wild rice
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 tsp baking powder
- 2 tsp Montreal-style seasoning
- 1½ cups plain yogurt
- ½ cup Irish-style garlic-chive butter
- 1 cup gruyere cheese, divided

Garnish

- 4 small skewers
- 4 pan-seared morels
- 4 small, pan-fried onion rings
- 4 cubes of grilled steak

In a deep skillet over medium-high heat, melt butter. Add onions and sauté covered, stirring often, until softened. Reduce heat to medium, stir in salt and cook for another 30 minutes, stirring occasionally until onions caramelize. Add garlic and stir constantly for 3 minutes. Add the white wine and sherry, stirring until almost absorbed. Add broth, Worcestershire, thyme, bay leaf, and ½ tsp pepper. Bring to a boil then reduce to a gentle simmer and cover. Cook over medium-low heat for about 20 minutes, stirring occasionally. Preheat oven to 400°F.

To make the wild rice bread balls, use a food processor to mince cooked wild rice. Place minced wild rice in a sturdy 1-quart plastic bag and add flour, baking powder, and Montreal-style seasoning. Close bag and shake until well blended. Add the yogurt to the bag, remove the air and close the bag. Using hands, knead bag until all ingredients are well blended and moistened. Melt the garlic-chive butter in a 6-inch skillet. Cut a tiny hole in the corner of the bag. Pipe bread dough into ½ teaspoon-sized portions, then let dough fall directly into hot butter. Move quickly to fill pan with balls. Use a fork to roll and brown evenly. Remove bread balls, hold warm.



Return to the soup and discard herb solids. Add red wine vinegar and remaining pepper. Place 4 ovenproof soup bowls on a rimmed pan. Divide bread balls in half. Place ½ of bread balls into the bottom of the bowls, evenly divided. Sprinkle bread with half of the Gruyere then fill each bowl with soup ⅔ full.

Sprinkle bowls with half the remaining gruyere. Add remaining bread balls evenly among bowls and top with remaining gruyere. Place pan with bowls in oven and allow cheeses to melt and brown, about 7 minutes. Thread four skewers with a seared morel, onion ring, and grilled steak cube. Remove bowls from oven and top with assembled skewers. Serve and enjoy! Yield: 4 servings.

For readers: Receive a free copy of the Council’s latest recipe brochure, *Minnesota Wild Rice Recipes & Answers to Frequently Asked Questions*, featuring 2023 contest winning recipes including *Wild Rice Beer Bread*, by sending a self-addressed, stamped envelope to: **Minnesota Cultivated Wild Rice Council; 4630 Churchill St, #1; St Paul, MN 55126.**

Dear Editor: In consideration of running this press release and sending us a copy, we’d like to thank you by sending you a package of Minnesota cultivated wild rice. If you are not able to accept the gift, we’d still appreciate receiving a copy of the article to share with our hard-working farmers – Thank you!