

Union's salad lady wins food award

by Adella Wacker

"Culinary Excellence Award," reads the first-place trophy Vicki Panevics won in the Nebraska Restaurant Association Food and Equipment Show in Omaha.

Mrs. Panevics, who has worked four years in the Nebraska Union main kitchen, won in the cold canape, or hors d'oeuvre, division of the Oct. 23 competition. Canapes, however, aren't her only food specialty.

Mrs. Panevics said she works well with meats and, if circumstances had allowed, could have entered any of the competition areas, except maybe one.

"I'm not a baker," she admitted. But her attitude is "maybe I try it, maybe I can do it."

Mrs. Panevics, born 60 years ago in Russia, also used to paint, she said, so she approaches cooking with the same artist's sense of color and design.

"I can make melon baskets so gorgeous, you can't believe it," she said.

Although she supervises the Union kitchen salad department, Mrs. Panevics said that basically she is a cook, and she has always been interested in cooking.

She remembers cooking for 14 people simultaneously at harvest time on her step-father's farm when she was just 15 years old.

Ag college in Latvia

Her precision and neatness in cooking, she said, was developed while attending agricultural college for four and a half years in Latvia, a small country near Russia.

Besides attending language and accounting classes, she said students sometimes were sent to do farm work like milking cows. And every Monday, she remembers, she cooked.

The students learned to cook everything, she said, and they always had to finish and be precise.

This feeling is reflected in her work now. If part of a canape should be in the center, it's in the center, she said.

Mrs. Panevics said she always arranges her canape shapes to make a display; she is conscious of order down to the last straight toothpick.

There was no tasting in the Omaha competition. The judging was for appearance and practicality.

"I do a very particular job," she said, "and that's why it looks so good."

Just as important in a contest or at a party where canapes are served before dinner with drinks, is a "get acquainted" setting in the arrangement of color, Mrs. Panevics said.

Arrangement attracts judges

There may be nothing special on that plate of canapes, she said, but it's good color arrangement that attract the judges most.

For example, she suggested imagining simple deviled eggs, but colored pastel with tiny cuts around the outside, flowered yellow yolk inside, onion and green parsley on top against a background of paper lace on spotless silver and crystal.

Mrs. Panevics said she used lots of caviar and shrimp in the 13 different kinds of canapes she took to Omaha. She displayed two dozen of each kind on her table.

"It was so elegant," she said of that display.

Mrs. Panevics' husband, Harry, didn't seem to have too much to say when his wife tried talking about her first competition.

She said he made fun of her, asking her if she really expected to win in Omaha. She said that she agreed to enter the competition for the Union, but, she told him, she'd never won anything so why should she now?

"But underneath myself," Mrs. Panevics said, "I like to win." And she plans to enter the next competition.



Vicki Panevics and her canapes . . . few hors d'oeuvres remain after serving time.

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