

# Community enjoys food and raises funds at chefs battle

BY ERIC CRUMP  
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Maureen Mader was quite satisfied with the second annual Battle of the Chefs event hosted by her deli, Dunning's Market in downtown Flossmoor, on July 16.

"Everything ran smoothly. The weather was perfect. The food was delicious. The band was amazing. We sold 190 tickets but we ended up with almost 240 people at the event," she said. "I exceeded my personal goal of raising \$40,000. I think we raised about \$46,000 between our generous sponsors ticket sales and all of the donations, so that's pretty amazing."

The fundraising total was more than twice what the first event brought in last year. Proceeds benefit the iCanDream Center, which provides programs for youth with intellectual disabilities, autism and various learning difficulties, according to the organization's website.

The main event was a contest between two teams of professional chefs. Each team had 45 minutes to prepare a dish with the same set of ingredients.

Mader said the Chicago team 3vs3, led by Chef Jerome Browne won the battle. She and the rest of her team, which included Chef Won Kim of Kimski restaurant in Chicago and Mader's nephew, Matt Meschede, who is a food photographer, took the defeat with grace.

"But we're OK with that because it's all in good fun," she said. "The most important thing is that we are bringing autism awareness and understanding to our community so they view our kids and hope-

fully employ them and befriend them. The iCanDream Center is an amazing place where they attempt to do just that."

Mader expressed gratitude to the many sponsors and volunteers who helped make the event a success.

Evisha Ford, founder and executive director of iCanDream Center in Tinley Park, said she was grateful for Mader's efforts.

"Fundraisers are so important to what we do, because we believe in a whole student approach," she said, including a recreation program and a peer-to-peer support program.

"We really need events like this to raise funds, raise awareness, decrease stigma, to elevate the idea that people with disabilities can have jobs, have meaning and purpose," she said.

Flossmoor Mayor Michelle Nelson served on the panel of judges for the contest and said the experience was a treat in more ways than one.

"All of the chefs were incredibly creative, talented and made me want to elevate dinners for my own family," she said. "I spoke with several people who were visiting Flossmoor for the first time and were completely charmed by our village. That's especially rewarding for me to hear."

She also met a boy who receives services from iCanDream and is interested in becoming a chef. He was able to assist the 3vs3 team with their entry.

"He was overwhelmed by the number of people who came out to support him and other people living with autism," she said. "It was a treat to meet him."



Provided photo from Marcellus Marsh/Bionic Content  
Maureen Mader, owner of Dunning's Market, left, gets a hug from Evisha Ford, founder and executive director of the iCanDream Center. Dunning's hosted the second annual Battle of the Chefs competition and fundraiser benefitting iCanDream, an agency providing support for people with autism.

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