

Retiree Squashes the Competition in Recipe Challenge

Written by Ginny Grimsley

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Curried Butternut Squash Dip to Join Dave's Gourmet Lineup

A retired recipe developer who never stopped playing with her food won the national Dave's Gourmet Recipe Challenge and a potential \$1 million in royalties.

Pat Dugan's Curried Butternut Squash Dip was among the finalists sampled by about 400 food professionals at the Winter Fancy Food Show, Jan. 15-17 in San Francisco, said Dave Hirschkop, owner of Dave's Gourmet (www.davesgourmet.com), which produces award-winning hot sauces, pasta sauces, salsas and dips.

"It was clear cut who the winner was," Hirschkop said of the foodies' votes. "It's a very tasty dip, an unusual combination of flavors with a little kick."

Dugan, 66, got an immediate \$2,000 advance on the royalties to be paid when her creation becomes part of the Dave Gourmet line-up later this year. Distribution might be limited, Hirschkop said, because the dip requires store refrigeration, unlike his other products.

That doesn't bother the former newspaper food columnist who worked as a chef and recipe developer for Corning Inc., the company best known for Pyrex casserole dishes. (It now manufactures glass and ceramics for high-tech applications.)

"I love, love, love butternut squash," said Dugan, who teaches cooking and recipe development, and plans to publish a cookbook, "VeggieTizers," featuring her creations.

"It's available 'most all over the United States; home gardeners can grow it; it's affordable. It's low in calories, high in fiber; it has vitamins B and A, beta keratin, and it has a lovely taste."

Dugan puts butternut squash in macaroni and cheese, chili stew and on pizza, the recipe for which came with a jar of Dugan's favorite Dave's Gourmet product: Butternut Squash Pasta Sauce. It's also his best seller.

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She had already developed her Curried Butternut Squash Recipe, and got raves from her chief critic, husband Roy Ernst, when she learned of Dave's contest.

"I started going through my A-to-Z files of recipes," she said. "I came to an Artichoke Roasted Red Pepper Salsa that could be a replacement for tomato salsa. Then I got to the end of the B's and I found this recipe that we loved.

"When I made it, I stirred in some Greek yogurt because we live (most of the year) in Tarpon Springs, Fla., which is a Greek town. And I used Dave's chipotle powder sauce, so it has a little zip in there."

She submitted both recipes.

Though this is Dugan's eighth contest win since she retired in 2002, the thrill never gets old, she said.

"It's exciting. This is a passion for me; a creative outlet."

Hirschkop says recipe contests will become either an annual event for his company or an on-going "cash bounty" opportunity. His business is all about innovation and great flavor, and the best place to find both, he said, is in America's kitchens.

"We have thousands of great cooks out there who can come up with some incredible dishes."

About Dave's Gourmet

San Francisco-based Dave's Gourmet was founded by Dave Hirschkop. After graduating from Boston University in the 1980s, he opened a mom-and-pop restaurant called Burrito Madness. There, he began experimenting with hot sauces and later moved into pasta sauces. He started Dave's Gourmet 18 years ago, and has products in major retailers including Safeway, Williams-Sonoma, Whole Foods and Costco.