

Local grad gets national exposure by competing on ‘Chopped’

By Joshua Gordon✉



Chippewa Valley High School graduate Hassan Musselmani competed on the Sept. 5 episode of “Chopped,” taking second place. (Photo courtesy of Food Network)

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MACOMB COUNTY — Chippewa Valley High School graduate Hassan Musselmani stood in New York earlier this year, having poured his heart into a makeshift dessert, when he heard the three words he hoped wouldn't be attached to his name.

“You've been Chopped.”

Musselmani, who attended culinary arts courses at Dakota High School and grew up in Clinton Township, was one of four contestants on the latest episode of “Chopped” on the Food Network. While the episode was filmed in the spring, it aired Sept. 5.

The episode centered around four chefs who own and operate food trucks. Musselmani runs the Drunken Rooster food truck in Detroit and throughout Macomb County.

And while Musselmani didn't win — he finished in second place — he said being on the show helps him build his brand and bring awareness to the food he is cooking in metro Detroit. In 2016, Musselmani was on the winter season of “Hell's Kitchen” on Fox, and he said that has already helped exposure.

“I opened my food truck last summer and it is good for business to be out there and be seen,” he said. “It would be great to win, but that is not really the reason I go on. I go on to build a brand and get my name out there.”

Musselmani said he saw the casting call online and applied. He went through a phone, video and in-person interview before he was selected.

When applying for “Hell's Kitchen,” Musselmani said it was more of a strenuous process because the filming was stretched out over a month and he had to be cooped up with other contestants.

On “Chopped,” it was a one-day filming session in New York that made it easier on Musselmani and his family.

“I was on eight episodes of ‘Hell's Kitchen’ and being away from my family for a month, it was exhausting mentally,” he said. “I tell people ‘Hell's Kitchen’ is like the ‘Real World’ of cooking where they try to stir up more drama. It was a great opportunity, but doing ‘Chopped,’ I knew it would be more centered toward the cooking.”

Musselmani has roots in Lebanese and Arabic food from his father's side, and more of an urban influence from his mother's side. Over the years, he has worked as a consultant for several chefs and restaurants in the metro Detroit area.

At the Drunken Rooster, Musselmani specializes in tacos with a Mediterranean twist.

That cuisine came in handy during the first challenge on “Chopped.”

The four chefs were presented with a mystery box of ingredients to create an appetizer in 20 minutes and the first ingredient was a goat taco. Musselmani created a goat and Asian long bean spring roll that, despite being a small portion, got good remarks from the judges.

After the first chef had been “Chopped,” the three remaining contestants had 30 minutes to create an entree with new mystery ingredients, including a lobster roll and ramen noodles.

Musselmani took a unique approach by creating a cold ramen noodle salad with the lobster. The judges said it was “weird” and he made some smart moves, overall enjoying the dish.

In the third and final round, Musselmani went head-to-head with a New York-based food truck owner to create a dessert with ingredients including chocolate-covered bananas and dessert nachos.

Musselmani created fried dough balls and made a chocolate banana sauce, but the judges felt the dough balls didn’t come together and ended the episode by telling Musselmani he was “Chopped.”

Brandon Schatko, a long-time friend of Musselmani, said of any of his friends, he feels Musselmani would be the one to really flourish in an environment like “Chopped” with time crunches and television cameras.

“He has the personality for it and it fits him well,” Schatko said. “He is good with people; he is good with interactions and getting people motivated and has a great sense of humor.

“He always cooks what he wants and is not afraid to bring a little of his own heritage into it.”

Musselmani said he was nervous, but excited, when the filming took place and was pleasantly surprised by how helpful the Food Network staff was in helping the contestants get acclimated with the kitchen.

Despite not winning the \$10,000 prize, Musselmani hopes being on “Chopped,” and “Hell’s Kitchen,” will help him achieve his ultimate goal.

“My whole idea is to build a national brand, do something retail and open a little restaurant one day,” he said. “The show took me out of my element, but it will be wonderful for my publicity, and I will continue to pursue going on television.”