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## Local foodie family conducts annual taste-test tradition

Submitted by Craig Coane



Photos provided

winner.

"We always talked about doing something like this," said Craig Coane, looking back to four years ago. "Once we came up with the concept, we couldn't wait to try it."

The first year they chose upscale burger joints, tasting the best burgers, fries, and vanilla shakes at three nearby spots. And they spared no details, even adding the homemade ketchups for each into their scoring sheets.

"Not knowing for sure which item came from which restaurant definitely made it even more fun," Craig Coane recalled.

Lafayette's own Roam was the big winner that year. "We were pretty surprised," Kayla Coane remembered. "We always like Roam but matched up against the competition it really stood out."

After subsequent years with themes that included sushi in 2020 (that's a lot of spicy tuna rolls) and Mexican food in 2021 (last year's version was held in Lake Tahoe where the family lived for a month), this year's edition of the Coane family New Year's Day taste test was an obvious choice for Lamorinda diners: Chinese food.

With a plethora of Chinese restaurant options in Lamorinda to choose from, the Coanes settled on the three choices from their hometown of Moraga: Chef Chao, China Moon and Golden Palace. With so many food items to choose from, they narrowed it down to four 'go-tos' for most Chinese food lovers: hot and sour soup, pot stickers, chicken chow mein and orange chicken.

One of the keys to success, as the family has learned, is ensuring all food items make it back to their house at the same time to ensure the freshest and hottest comparisons.

"This year was easy," says Karen Coane. "All three restaurants were basically within walking distance!"

Craig and Kayla sped off to grab the food items while Karen and Michael prepped the table and scoring sheets for this year's competition. "We're getting this thing down," says Michael Coane. "We were ready to eat!"

After laying out the enormous feast across their expanded dining room table and pinning their scoring sheets to clip boards, it was go time.

The hot and sour soup winner? A three-way tie. "They were all really good in different ways."

Next up: pot stickers. Again, the Coanes were surprised at how different each pot sticker was prepared. "I used to think pot stickers were pretty much all the same - that is not the case," said Karen. The winner: China Moon. "They just have that classic take on a pot sticker with fresh stuffing and a golden slightly crisp dough."

Their third item: chicken chow mein. With healthy portions and mounds of chow mein to dig through, the

The Coane family loves food. Whether it's mom, Karen, cooking her favorite family meals at home, daughter Kayla journaling another entry into her Instagram "thatfooddoe" account, son Michael eating everything in sight to put on extra weight for high school sports, or dad, Craig, and his obsession with tasting different types of foods.

Four years ago the family came up with a novel idea to help ring in the New Year and fill their stomachs after their late night New Year's Eve celebrations: a blind taste test of their favorite foods from local restaurants.

The idea was simple - pick a common food theme and three restaurants that serve similar items. Order the same items from all three restaurants and bring them all home to taste side-by-side. And of course, have a scoring sheet to tabulate the results and pick an overall

Coanes were again surprised by each restaurant's take. "The thickness of the noodles, amount of vegetables and chicken, and overall flavor were very different," recalled Craig Coane. The chow mein winner: Chef Chao.

Finally, orange chicken was the entrée of choice to close out the food eating extravaganza. If you thought orange chicken is the same at every Chinese joint, you are sorely mistaken. "We saw the biggest difference between restaurants with their take on orange chicken, but the top choice was obvious to all of us," said Michael. The orange chicken champion: Golden Palace.

As Craig gathered all the sheets for the final scoring, the Coanes were happy to see each restaurant had a winning food item. "They were all good," remembers Kayla.

But every great taste test competition needs a champion, and after final tabulations the 2022 champion was Golden Palace.

"We love Chef Chao and have for years," said Karen, "but we're planning to frequent all three restaurants now that we've been able to taste them all side by side."

COVID has made it even more meaningful to come up with traditions that can bring the family together and have a little fun.

Craig added, "This is our way to support local businesses . and get a great meal at the same time!"

What's on tap for a theme for next year's feast? They're leaning toward Italian.



Photos provided



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