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PHOTO CAPTION: *The “Cupcake Wars” team of Olivia Plaut, Lauren Melanson, and Nolan Brennan display a range of emotions as they present their entries to the judges.*



PHOTO CAPTION: *Erin Donohue and Jeremy Bras-Jorge decorate their cupcake entries with a holiday theme.*

## Cupcake Showdown at Simsbury High School

SIMSBURY—During the week of January 16, 2017, Family and Consumer Sciences teacher Sara Garthwait’s “Bake Shop” classes, armed with cupcake pans and buttercream frosting, faced off against each other for the chance to battle in their version of the popular TV series “Cupcake Wars.”

It being her first year of teaching the course, Garthwait was eager to inspire her students to “experiment a little and think outside the box.” Each of the teams, typically two to four students, began with a simple yellow cake recipe. Then they came up with a theme for a trio of cupcakes that would be submitted for judging. One team selected “kids’ favorites” as their theme and created a strawberry shortcake cupcake with separate layers of whipped cream frosting, an ice cream sundae cupcake with a cherry on top, and a classic peanut butter and jelly cupcake. Another team chose to have each of their three cupcakes represent a different holiday—Valentine’s Day, Saint Patrick’s Day, and the Fourth of July.

Garthwait said she “enjoyed throwing a secret ingredient at them,” which was honey, mint, or maple syrup as a requirement in at least one flavor profile—a different ingredient for each one of the classes just to ensure no one got the jump on the competition. The cupcakes were judged on presentation, taste, texture, and creativity.

Along with Garthwait, Business teacher Doug Nielson, Supervisor of Art K-12 Shannon Gagne, and Science teacher Mark Melingonis served as faculty judges during one of the class periods. The atmosphere was generally quite serious, although laughter broke out when students on one team observed Nielson’s expression as he tasted a vanilla caramel fudge concoction that had not come out as well as the students had hoped.

The winning team on this particular day—with the “kids’ favorites” cupcakes—was sophomore Margaret Rowland and freshman Austin Taylor. Other winning teams were freshmen Olivia Nunez, Sarah Cosgrove, and sophomore Jessica Zambuto, and the team of sophomores John DeMaio, Tyler Ladden, and freshman Madison Lacharite.

Said Garthwait, “The students demonstrated what they had learned in class—it was a successful transfer of skills and knowledge. They were willing to think outside the box and take risks—some more successfully than others. It was obvious they had a sense of pride in their accomplishments and were excited to share their work with the judges. Overall there was lots of learning and fun happening!”

Added Garthwait, “And what’s learning if it isn’t fun, too?”

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