



Press Contact: Lauren Sklar
Phone: 646-336-3745; Email: lsklar@foodnetwork.com

FOOD NETWORK STAR

Season 9 – Finalist Bios

Nikki Dinki, 29 (New York City), created an online cooking show to highlight her semi-vegetarian culinary style and share her newfound joy of cooking. Growing up a picky eater, Nikki's diet consisted of bagels and cereal and after moving to New York years later, she realized her eating habits hadn't really changed. On a mission to become a more well-rounded eater, she immersed herself in learning to cook and loved it. Coming from a large family, Nikki always knew she wanted to be in the spotlight. After several acting gigs and per a friend's suggestion, Nikki combined her passion for cooking with her zeal for acting and began blogging with videos, recipes and stories on her ventures in the kitchen.

Andres Guillama, 26 (Waynesville, N.C.), grew up in a traditional Cuban family with six siblings and he began working at his father's restaurant at an early age. He has struggled with his weight in the past, but lost 150 pounds by changing his habits. Andres now uses his charm and wit to educate youth about obesity and nutrition as a Childhood Obesity Prevention Coach. He believes healthy foods can be delicious – and is looking forward to showing viewers how. Andres is also dedicated to inspiring young men to get in the kitchen and cook.

Rodney Henry, 47 (Baltimore), is owner of Baltimore's well-known shop Dangerously Delicious Pies, where he's turned the traditional dish on its head for ten years and has opened additional shops in Detroit and Washington, D.C. His passion for pie began during his summers in Indiana as a child, after learning the craft from his grandmother and great aunt. This former rocker spent years on the road as a musician, and he would often trade his sweet and savory pies for free lodging. Now a father of two, Rodney's distinctive style, innovative cooking and no-nonsense personality make him stand out in a crowd.

Chris Hodgson, 27 (Cleveland), is a graduate of Le Cordon Bleu who, inspired by the food trucks he saw while living in New York City, brought the very first food truck to the city of Cleveland. His truck, Dim and Den Sum, gained a cult following and lots of praise, helping pave the way for Cleveland's food truck culture. He went on to open a second truck and a brick and mortar Hodges and become a partner and consulting chef to the Driftwood Restaurant Group.

Connie "Chef Lovely" Jackson, 27 (Los Angeles), was born and raised in Chicago and was doted on as the baby of her family, earning her the nickname "Lovely." She learned to cook by helping her mom in the kitchen, and went on to attend culinary school and earn three degrees, her most advanced is a Bachelor's in Culinary Management at the Illinois Institute of Art. Lovely is truly glam, working with diamond-encrusted knives and edible diamonds as a private chef for celebrities and professional athletes.

Russell Jackson, 49 (San Francisco), takes risks in and out of the kitchen. Recognized most recently for his underground supper club in San Francisco, Russell takes local, fresh ingredients and gives them a whimsical twist - creating food that's anything but ordinary. After graduating from the California Culinary Academy, he dove into the culinary scene in Los Angeles and later in San Francisco owning and running restaurants for more than ten years. Russell began cooking at three-years-old with applesauce as his first dish and since then, the kitchen has been home to this mohawked chef.

Danushka Lysek, 37 (New York City), grew up in Canada and took over the kitchen at home at a young age. She graduated from culinary school in 2006 but credits much of her experience and knowledge to things outside the classroom. After noting that the restaurant business was not in her wheelhouse, she served as a personal chef in Los Angeles. She then moved to New York and continued working as a private chef serving farm-to-table dishes with seasonal influences. Her brutally honest and opinionated attitude is a force to be reckoned with in the kitchen.

Daniela Perez-Reyes, 29 (Haleiwa, Hawaii), was born and raised in Peru and is currently the Chef de Cuisine at a Hawaiian catering company. Daniela graduated from The Art Institute at San Diego with a Culinary Arts degree before taking a four month course at Le Cordon Bleu Peru to hone her skills in South American cuisine. After spending time in California, Daniela moved to Hawaii to chase her dreams and passion for food. Always infusing her traditional Peruvian and Polynesian twists in her dishes, Daniela brings sass to the kitchen while never compromising on flavor.

Viet Pham, 34 (Salt Lake City), born in a refugee camp in Malaysia, began cooking for his brother after moving to California while his parents worked to provide for the family. The James Beard Award semi-finalist graduated from the California Culinary Academy before working in restaurants in San Francisco and eventually opened his own restaurant in Salt Lake City. He is currently working on a new restaurant project - Fire and Water in Park City, Utah. Named one of Food and Wine's Best New Chefs in 2011, Viet's international background impacted his culinary style, and his eclectic and global perspective shines in his dishes.

Damaris Phillips, 32 (Louisville, Ky.), a Southern spitfire, graduated from Jefferson Community and Technical College with a degree in Culinary Arts and now teaches at the same school inspiring up-and-coming chefs to follow their dreams. Before returning to teach, Damaris took on various restaurant and baking jobs, working in the front and back of house. One of five kids, Damaris learned to cook at an early age and was responsible for cooking one night a week for her large family. Damaris uses her wit and her traditional Southern cuisine to pack a one-two punch in the kitchen.

Stacey Poon-Kinney, 34 (San Diego) grew up in a food family – her great-grandfather was a chef and her great-grandmother ran a diner. She was chopping, dicing and stirring from an early age, but her love of dance took over and she began performing onstage. She eventually returned to the food world, and now the married, mom-of-two owns the restaurant The Trails Eatery with her father. Don't let Stacey's big smile, unique sense of style and carefree approach to life fool you – she is a competitor.

Chad Rosenthal, 37 (Ambler, Pa.), a self-taught chef, got his first taste of cooking at just five years old, and he soon became passionate about all things food. As a child, he put on weekly cooking shows for his family and is now looking to make that childhood dream a reality. After spending years working in corporate America, Chad is currently in the process of opening a barbecue/comfort food and whiskey bar in the Philadelphia area, after getting his feet wet with two other ventures. A father of two, Chad has won several barbecue competitions and eats, breathes, sleeps all things BBQ. He is on the local advisory committee for The Culinary Arts Institute.

###