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## **All-Star Academy** **Home Cook Bios**

**Mike Castaneda** (Cache, Oklahoma) – Formerly of Kansas, this soldier and father of two is known all across his Army base for his high-end dishes and molecular techniques. He’s being relieved of duty in a few months, and Mike can’t stand the idea of getting a 9-5 office job. Winning the grand prize would mean he could follow his dreams and open up a food truck or a restaurant.

**Mimi Chang** (New Jersey)

Mimi was raised by strict, traditional, Korean parents. They believed that cooking was a hobby and not a job, so to fulfill their American dreams she went to law school. Now, married with two kids and seventeen years as a head hunter at a law firm, Mimi is ready to follow her dreams and cook professionally. She is ready to prove to her parents that success can also come in the kitchen, and to show her sons to follow your dreams and do what you love.

**Vanessa Craig** (Santa Barbara, California) - When Vanessa’s step-father passed away she lost her rock. Now, she uses cooking as a way to honor his memory and get through tough times. Winning this competition would be the financial break her family needs to move forward.

**Sharon Damante** (Napa Valley, California) -This Italian Nonna is a firecracker in the kitchen who loves experimenting with exotic ingredients and new techniques. Always passionate about food, Sharon and her husband opened a gastropub in 2006. Sadly, their ill-timed dream was crushed in the recession and the couple lost their entire life savings. Winning the competition would mean they could finally buy a house again and, offer this cook validation of her true abilities in the kitchen.

**August Dannehl** (Los Angeles, California) – Originally from New York, August may be young but he has eaten at more Michelin starred restaurants in his 28 years than most people will in their lifetime! A foodie through and through, August loves trying to recreate fine dining dishes for all of his friends. August joined the Navy to pay for school and see the world but is still in \$50,000 in debt. Winning this competition would allow him to enter the next phase of his life.

**Angela George** (Dallas, Texas) - Creative Director and CEO of her own design company, Angela is the boss at work and the boss in her kitchen. She is out to prove that even a career-driven woman can still cook amazing meals at home. Angela travels the world searching for culinary inspiration and uses fresh and exotic ingredients to create memorable dishes.

**Joseph Harris** (Glen Burnie, Maryland) - When he’s not singing at church, you can find Joseph in the kitchen. Two years ago, Joseph’s mother had a stroke and he put his dreams of a culinary career on hold to take care of her full-time. Winning this competition would mean he could finally attend culinary school.

**Bill Joerger** (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)

Bill always loved to cook, but after an unexpected heart surgery at age 29 he stepped his game up. In bed for three months, all he did was watch Food Network. Now, a Philadelphia firefighter, he fills the firehouse with smells of filets, crab sauce, and risotto. Winning this competition would mean Bill could provide a college education for his two daughters.



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**Thomas Mann** (New Orleans, Louisiana)

This sculptor and jewelry artist treats cooking like another one of his art forms. Thomas always loved to cook, since he and his brother owned and operated a natural food store and juice bar back in the day, but food became even more important when he was creating meals for his wife while she battled cancer. Now, he creates elaborate dinner events to entertain artist friends and to stay close with family.

**Sherri Williams** (Crestview, Florida) - This grandmother and military wife quit her job to pursue competitive cooking full-time and hasn't looked back. In the past few years Sherri has won over 60 competitions and prizes up to ten thousand dollars. Being an Army wife was a difficult road for Sherri, but cooking helped her through the hard times. She knows that if she can make it through multiple deployments she can make it through anything!

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