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FOOD NETWORK STAR: COMEBACK KITCHEN

Finalist Bios

Penny Davidi, 42 (Los Angeles, CA) – Happily married mother of two, this chef and entrepreneur grew up learning the art of cooking from the women in her family and used this knowledge as a launching pad to fuse creativity and personality to create her own innovative recipes. Raised in California, Penny franchised Pizza Rustica and opened a popular branch in Beverly Hills. A former competitor on season 7 of *Food Network Star*, Penny currently helps consult and create menus for restaurants throughout Southern California.

Matthew Grunwald, 23 (Scottsdale, AZ) – Matthew was the youngest finalist on season 11 of *Food Network Star*, but don't let his age and enthusiasm fool you: he's got the experience of a chef twice his age. At sixteen, he began working in professional kitchens, became a food writer by seventeen, and is now a sous chef at one of the finest restaurants in the Southwest. Matthew's passion is feeding people and is dedicated to cooking robust flavors.

Martita Jara, 39 (San Diego, CA) – Martita began working in her family's restaurant business at a young age, with her mom's authentic Mexican home cooking inspiring her culinary passion. Her parents moved to the U.S. two years before she was born and Martita credits them with her work ethic and perseverance. Martita attended a few semesters at culinary school, but most of her skills are self-taught, showcasing her talent on season 8 of *Food Network Star*. She loves to entertain and cooks with loads of Mexican flavor!

Brianna Jenkins, 35 (Atlanta, GA) – Brianna competed on season 6 of *Food Network Star*. Originally studying food journalism at Georgia Perimeter College, Brianna fell in love with cooking after moving to Atlanta. She graduated from the Ecole Supérieure de Cuisine Française in Paris and now serves as the executive chef and owner of her own catering company, Amuse. In her spare time, Brianna teaches cooking classes and travels the world looking for culinary inspiration.

Chris Kyler, 34 (Fredericksburg, VA) – Chris received culinary training while in the Navy, where he was known for his sense of humor, charisma and serious cooking chops. After several years working in restaurants and catering firms, Chris competed on season 10 of *Food Network Star*. He now runs Kyler's A+ Catering, a gourmet mobile catering company with an emphasis on exciting fresh cuisine.

Michele Ragussis, 46 (Provincetown, MA) – Michele grew up in an Italian/Greek family where food was, and still is, a big part of their lives. Michele fell in love with the New England lifestyle and cuisine when she moved to Rhode Island to attend college. After deciding that hands-on restaurant experience was more valuable to her than attending classes, Michele went on to spend fifteen years in executive chef positions. While her distinctive tattoos and piercings may look intimidating, Michele brought her relaxed and fun personality as a competitor on season 8 of *Food Network Star*.

Dominick Tesoriero, 31 (Staten Island, NY) – Dominick is a charming, funny New Yorker who has been hamming it up for his friends and family all his life. His culinary training took him to Italy, where he refined his skills and placed second in an international cooking competition. A former competitor on season 11 of *Food Network Star*, Dominick believes in quality ingredients, solid technique and simple cooking. He now owns New York's first and only mac and cheese food truck.

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