

?The Northmen? semi-finalists in national Pita Pit competition



By Mike Pickford

Following a bitterly contested quarter-final match-up with ?The Condor' from Kitchener, Orangeville's very own ?The Northmen' is one of the last four contestants in Pita Pit Canada's Greatest Pita Challenge.

Confused? Let me explain.

As a part of its Canada 150 celebrations, Pita Pit challenged each of its 250-plus franchisees to come up with the pita to beat all pitas. And, while taste is important, Pita Pit was looking for something with a story. From that, ?The Northmen' was born.

?When we first heard about this contest we knew right away that we wanted to take part,? local Pita Pit franchisee Brad Horton told the Citizen. ?We really wanted to focus on the story, right from the get-go. So we sat down and asked ourselves, ?What's important to the Town of Orangeville?' Well, we pretty quickly narrowed it down to the Orangeville Northmen.?

He added, ?We couldn't think of any other organization than the Northmen that have been doing what they have been doing for so long. They have more than 30 years of history in this community, they're always very community-driven in everything they do? It just seemed like the perfect way to go.?

And so with the story pretty much writing itself, Brad, along with his wife Melanie, started to think recipes. They invited their staff of roughly 20 members to submit unique food formulas of their own before hosting a community taster. During that taster, members of the Junior A Northmen joined Mayor Jeremy Williams and Matt Sawyer, head coach of the Toronto Rock and an Orangeville Northmen alumni, to decide which pita would represent Orangeville in the contest.

The winner was a mouth-watering concoction infusing Buffalo chicken with black bean, topped up with grilled onions, mushrooms and green peppers.

But wait, there's a kick! Diced hot peppers seasoned with tex mex, garlic and ancho chipotle sauce. The pita is also garnished with spinach, romaine and iceberg lettuce, tomato, cucumber, avocado, pineapple and black olives, with a little tzatziki and barbecue sauce added for a smoky finish.

?We had a lot of fun coming up with The Northmen. It's strong and it has a kick ? just like our local lacrosse team,? Mr. Horton added. ?All in all, it's flavourful and it's delicious. We're hopeful it can go all the way.?

The Northmen has every chance of doing just that. Cruising through its quarter-final match-up with The Condor ? a steak-based creation out of Kitchener ? The Northmen now has a semi-final to look forward to. The Cavalier out of Bouctouche, New Brunswick is the only other pita to make it through so far.

Online voting concluded yesterday to decide whether The Mazza Burger (Winnipeg) or The Double Chicken Glory (Thunder Bay) will advance. Results were not available as of press time. The remaining contest pitting The Avotaco (Hamilton) and The Chicken Parmesan Oregano (Bedford, Nova Scotia) against each other commenced today.

Embracing his inner Northman, Mr. Horton said he wants to see the locally-inspired pita make it all the way and officially become

Canada's favourite pita. The reward? Orangeville's 'The Northmen' will be on offer at Pita Pit franchises across Canada throughout the month of August.

Kevin Pressburger, President of Pita Pit Canada, told the Citizen on Monday that this competition was the start of a long-term initiative titled 'Creation Nation', where the company hopes to inspire employees, franchisees and customers to get creative with their recipes and try something new the next time they order a pita.

'With the grill, all the toppings, sauces and spices, there really is an unlimited number of combinations regarding what you can put in a pita. As such we think this is a great way to kick off Creation Nation by celebrating Canada's 150th birthday and holding a fun competition between all of our stores to see what they can come up with.'

He added, 'We had 150 entries for this competition' To make the top eight you really had to submit something special. Our Pita Pit franchisee in Orangeville did just that with The Northmen. The combination of black bean and Buffalo chicken was unique, but it was the story that made it. It was a great submission.'

With the semi-finals set to kick off on Sunday (July 17), Mr. Horton is confident in his pita's ability to make it to the final.

'There's definitely that sense of Orangeville and Northmen pride brewing in this competition' Plus, who doesn't like to win? Who doesn't like to be the best?' Mr. Horton said. 'We put 110% into this, just as we do every day at Pita Pit, so it would be special to come out on top. It would be pretty huge.'

He also revealed 'The Northmen' would become a permanent fixture on both local Pita Pit menus.

For more information on Pita Pit Canada's Greatest Pita Challenge, visit pitapit.ca. Those who vote in the contest could be eligible to win a \$10,000 Canadian adventure of their choice, including a \$5,000 travel voucher and \$5,000 in spending money. Pita Pit is also giving away 20 gift cards valued at \$120 apiece.