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The Food Network may be calling La Quinta grad next

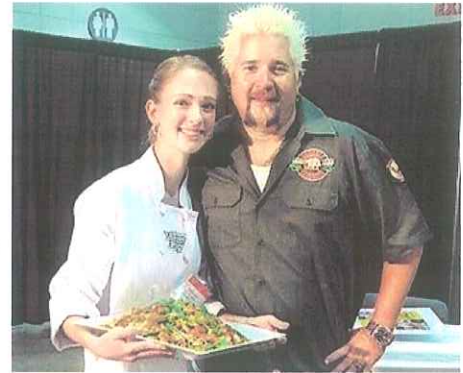
Erin Mascho got to cook with Guy Fieri at L.A. expo

MARIECAR MENDOZA • THE DESERT SUN • SEPTEMBER 3, 2008

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Erin Mascho hasn't hit the small screen yet, but last month she got a taste of fame alongside Food Network celebrity chef Guy Fieri.

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Erin Mascho (left) with Food Network chef Guy Fieri. (Mariecar Mendoza, The Desert Sun)



Erin Mascho (left) with Food Network chef Guy Fieri. (Mariecar Mendoza, The Desert Sun)

Mascho, a 2006 La Quinta High School graduate, made her debut as sous chef to Fieri in front of a crowd of 100 foodies, restaurateurs and professional chefs Aug. 23.

"I was prepping in the back for another demo and I heard him tell the audience, 'I have a special assistant.' Then next thing you know, he said, 'Erin, come up here,'" Mascho recalled. "Then he said, 'By the way, you're going to be cooking today.'"

A sophomore at The Collins College of Hospitality Management at Cal Poly Pomona, Mascho attended the Western Foodservice & Hospitality Expo on Aug. 23, and ended up assisting Fieri with a Thai-style stir-fry dish.

The two-day expo, sponsored by the California Restaurant Association, was held at the Los Angeles Convention Center and is touted as one of the biggest hospitality expos in the state.

"It was a blast," she said, laughing. "And after that, people kept saying, 'Hi Erin,' like they knew me. So I had my 15 minutes of fame there."

The 19-year-old was one of 20 student volunteers at the expo selected for the role — but she admits she may have had an advantage.

"I already knew Guy, even before he had his show," she said. "He's always been the hit of the party wherever he goes, but now he carries a Sharpie with him (for autographs). That's the only difference."

Fieri is a board member of the California Restaurant Association Education Foundation and met Mascho in 2005 when she participated in a ProStart competition.

ProStart is a nationwide career-building program for high school students interested in the restaurant and

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Mascho participated during her last two years at La Quinta High School as part of the school's culinary program.

"I've watched Erin blossom since she was a junior in high school," said Jerry Chesser, a professor at Collins College at Cal Poly Pomona and chairman of the California Restaurant Association Education Foundation. "What students like Erin do is awesome. They work very hard, they're very passionate and dedicated and it's important that we recognize that."

Mascho aspires to work in the management side of the hospitality and food industry and is expected to graduate from Cal Poly Pomona in 2010.

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