

## Chef apprentice enjoys taste of success

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Just a few years ago, Jonathan Nevin couldn't have imagined competing on a national stage. He had dropped out of high school, and had no direction until discovering his passion for culinary arts. He is now enjoying the taste of success earning bronze, silver and gold medals at skills competitions.

"I wasn't going anywhere in high school and fell into the wrong crowd," Nevin says. After studying culinary arts at Liaison College in Brampton, he returned to Meadowvale Secondary School, where co-op teacher Suzanne Primeau arranged a placement with renowned chef Olaf Mertens.

"He took me under his wing," the 20-year-old says of Mertens, owner of Ten, On the Curve and West 50 restaurants in Mississauga. "He taught me how to talk to people with confidence and how to talk about my story ... He also introduced me to the skills competitions. From the get go, I was really excited about competing."

After weeks of training, Nevin put his skills to the test at the Peel Region culinary arts competition and walked away with a silver medal. At the regional competition, he cooked up a bronze. The next step: the Ontario Technological Skills Competition in Waterloo. "Jonathan turned to me and said, 'I've got silver, I've got bronze; now I need gold,'" Primeau says. "And he did it."

With the win came a spot on Team Ontario, which travelled to the Canadian Skills Competition in Saskatchewan in June. Nevin capped off months of training with a silver medal, coming just two percentage points behind the gold medal winner from Quebec.

Along the way, he registered with the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program ([www.oyap.com](http://www.oyap.com)), a school-work transition program that allows students to earn cooperative education credits through placement in a construction, automotive, manufacturing or service trade. The hours they work on the job are put toward journeyperson certification.

"Jonathan is very intricate and very detailed. He has the bug and will be super special," chef Mertens says. He applauds apprenticeship training and is happy to give back. "I got the wrong answer in high school about how to become a chef," he says.

He returned to his native Germany at age 17 to fulfill his dream. "I want to give back and to give better answers. Now that I have some success and great partners, my dream is to let students know about it in Grade 7, before they start choosing high school courses in Grade 8," Mertens says.

Nevin currently works in the pastry department at West 50, where he creates featured desserts. After completing his high school diploma, Nevin plans to attend Humber College.

He dreams of opening his own dessert cafe and martini bar, and hopes to one day share his skills with budding chefs.

"He dug deep within himself and found his passion," Primeau says. "He's been sandwiched between great people and his name is out there ... He's a great motivation for a lot of people. It's great to help students find what they love and what they're good at; to help nurture their passion, find something that might turn them on and give them direction so you can say, 'Now it's your turn -- go fly.'"

### QUICK FACTS:

Each year, Skills Canada - Ontario co-ordinates the Ontario Technological Skills Competition: a three-day event that allows students from across the province to test themselves against industry standards. Winners went on to the Canadian Skills Competition, an Olympic-style skills competition where students showcase their technical and leadership skills. Visit [www.skillsontario.com](http://www.skillsontario.com) to learn more.



**Once a high school drop out, Jonathan Nevin has earned bronze, silver and gold medals at skills competitions across Canada.**