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From left, Haylie Keller, 8, Tatum Sculley, 7, Laurel Huff, 8, and Kimberly Melendez, 9, discuss their "Best Taste" award win in the Young Chefs Academy's weekly Cupcake Genius class.

Secret ingredient: check.

Surprise ingredient: check.

What team would be **Young Chefs Academy-Stone Oak's** Sweet Genius of the Week?

The competition was on.

Two teams of young chefs created and combined ingredients, such as gummy worms, icing and fondant to decorate Olympics-themed cupcakes during the academy's summer Cupcake Genius class.

"It's an activity they look forward to coming to every week," **Sloan Keller**, mother of 8-year-old **Haylie Keller**, said.

Chef Zelina Rodriguez said the competition is inspired by a combination of the reality television series “Cupcake Wars” and “Sweet Genius.”

Cupcake Genius is just one of the academy's summer cooking classes for children and teenagers.

Sloan Keller said her daughter has attended the academy's cooking classes for more than two years.

Haylie, recognizable by a black chef jacket with patches, was one of four of the academy's students considered to be a master chef at this particular Friday's Cupcake Genius class.

Other master chefs included Tatum Sculley, 7; **Laurel Huff**, 8; and **Kimberly Melendez**, 9.

“No boys have been a master chef — ever,” Sculley said.

Maddi Sculley, mother of Tatum, said the academy's students must complete different cooking class levels before they are considered master chefs.

Tasks include learning food preparation skills, kitchen safety and creating and documenting the preparation of two meals at home.

“The master chef program is all about when kids come weekly to learn different recipes,” Melendez said.

This year's Camp Can-I-Cook has provided tasty adventures in the world of French- and American-style cooking for chefs of all skill levels.

Rodriguez, who studied at **Le Cordon Bleu** in Austin, said her favorite minicamp this summer was “Vive La France.”

The preschool teacher-turned-chef has worked at the academy for more than one year.

After graduating from Le Cordon Bleu, she worked at a fine dining restaurant and later established her own catering company in San Antonio before teaching at Young Chefs Academy-Stone Oak.

“I love teaching kids and I love culinary — culinary's my passion,” Rodriguez said. “So, just the opportunity to teach kids what is my passion was just something that was amazing to me.”

For some of the academy's former students, the passion for cooking extends beyond the classroom and home.

Rodriguez said a former senior chef is now working in a kitchen because of what he learned at the academy.

The academy's brightly colored, child-friendly classroom gives students the opportunity to also improve math, science, reading, artistic and social skills.

Sloan Keller said she and Haylie have become friends with the other master chefs, their parents and the academy's staff members.

Courtney Warden, assistant chef, said the Kellers, among other students and their parents, attended her high school graduation.

“We're super close. I taught them before they were master chefs,” Warden said.

Even though Warden will be attending [San Antonio College](#) this fall to study nursing, she will continue to work at the academy alongside Regina Del Rio, her best friend and daughter of owner/executive chef [Mary Carmen Del Rio](#).

Mary Carmen Del Rio purchased San Antonio's lone Young Chefs Academy in 2007. The Stone Oak location is just one of many nationwide and worldwide.

The company was established in 2003 by [Julie Fabing Burlison](#) and [Suzy Vinson Nettles](#).

It has since become the first national franchise in the United States to offer culinary cooking classes, mini-camps and birthday parties aimed at children ages 4 to 14.

“This job actually taught me how to cook,” Warden said.

Young Chefs Academy-Stone Oak is located at 20330 Huebner Road, Suite 110. Call 402-0023 or visit www.youngchefsacademy.com for more information.

Jordan Gass-Poore' is a Seguin-based freelance writer.

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