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East High School students Adam Widdifield (left to right), Patrick Schwager and Bronson Martinez talk to customers about their burger, the Doc Holiday, at the Gold Dust Saloon on Thursday.

EDUCATION

Saloon shootout

East Eagles vie to become burger kings (and queens)

BY JON POMPIA
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

As East High School catering and DECA marketing students discovered in a real-world lesson, success in the food industry often boils down to the right combination of cook and hook.

The Gold Dust Saloon Burger Shootout II offered a convocation of Eagles the unique opportunity to conceive and perfect, and then market and promote, a specialty hamburger dish.

From a field of 11 burgers and marketing plans, the three deemed the most appealing by East students and staff — from a standpoint of both taste and sales pitch — moved on to the Gold Dust Saloon on

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Union Avenue Thursday.

There, judges and a steady stream of the dining public had the opportunity to partake of, and then rate, this delectable trio — all with a Western theme reflective of the Gold Dust’s atmosphere:

“The Outlaw,” with

its patty complemented by a combination of provolone, bacon, cream cheese and peppers, was criminally delicious enough to warrant its own “wanted” poster.

Tastier than a nugget of gold was “The Prospector,” accented by nacho cheese and crispy bacon.

And with a tip of the ole’ cowboy hat to “Tombstone” and its

signature line “I’ll be your Huckleberry,” “Doc Holiday” featured pepperjack cheese, bacon, grilled onions and grilled cheese buns.

The filled-to-capacity eatery was abuzz as the more promotionally savvy marketers and chefs made their way from table to table to tout their creations.

“The ‘Doc Holiday’ would have to be at least an 8.9 out of 10 because it’s so unique and it has a special feature to it with its buns,” ex-



SEE BURGER, 9A

The Doc Holiday burger, created by a group of East High School students, was the judges’ favorite at the Gold Dust Saloon Burger Shootout II.

BURGER/

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plained Adam Widdifield, a sophomore catering student. “The buns are actually grilled cheese buns, which makes us different.”

“And the special way we cook the bacon makes it even more tasty,” added fellow sophomore and chef-in-the-making Bronson Martinez.

Ally Chang, a senior marketer, begged to differ.

“‘The Prospector’ has everything that everybody loves — nacho cheese, bacon and the quarter-pound burger,” she said. “I’d buy it myself if it was on the menu.”

At the Passalaqua family table, all three offerings were being put to the taste test.

“I got ‘The Outlaw,’” said Jaelee Passalaqua. “Everything on it is really good and really mixes well.”

As for “The Prospector,” Aileen Passalaqua termed it “super good. I like cheese and ba-

con and it’s got grilled onions.

“It’s probably not good if you’re on a diet, but definitely for a ‘cheat day.’”

As far as Janelle Vrugeman was concerned, “The Doc Holiday” was going to be difficult to outgun.

“The toast is something different and it has the caramelized onions,” she explained. “And two types of cheese and bacon ... really, really good combination.”

After the appetizing smoke cleared and ballots/sales receipts were tabulated, entries representing both sides of the culinary “law” emerged victorious.

While the rebellious “Outlaw” was the overall winner, the “Doc Holiday” was the judges’ favorite.

“This has been a great experience for us as adults and judges,” said Pueblo City Schools (D60) school board President Barb Clementi,

one of a quartet of raters. “But it’s got to be amazing for kids — all the work that went into this, from creating the burger to marketing it, seeing it come to fruition and then sharing it.

“And every entry was amazing. It was very difficult to judge.”

Serving as moderators for Thursday’s Shootout were East instructors Janae Passalaqua (catering) and Mike Patti (marketing).

“The catering kids were really good about taking initial feedback and adjusting the burger to the liking of the customer,” said Passalaqua. “They were able to take input, look at the burger themselves and how the ingredients are layered, and make it just right.”

While The Shootout served as a final semester exam for catering students, it also raised funds for East’s DECA program. jpompia@chieftain.com