Written by Shannon Michael, Features Writer Monday, 15 July 2013 10:00



Photo by Yohko Kelley. Amber Kelley, of Woodinville, had the honor of sitting beside First Lady Michelle Obama in the East Room of the White House on July 9 when she was one of 54 kid chef Healthy Lunchtime Challenge recipe contest winners invited to a Kids' State Dinner. Amber's recipe for Nummy No-Noodle Lasagna was selected as Washington state's winning recipe. Woodinville resident Amber Kelley is one very lucky girl.

First, the 10-year-old's recipe for Nummy No-Noodle Lasagna was selected to represent Washington state in a nationwide recipe challenge to promote healthy lunches as part of First Lady Michelle Obama's Let's Move! initiative.

Next, she was invited, along with the other 49 state, three territory and one District of Columbia kid chef winners, to attend the Healthy Lunchtime Challenge & Kids' State Dinner at the White House, hosted by Mrs. Obama on July 9.

But, nothing prepared her for when she arrived in the East Room to find her seat and discovered she would be sitting right next to the First Lady.

Amber, who already has her own online cooking show and website, cookwithamber.com, blogged, tweeted and posted photos about her experiences in Washington, D.C. The ambitious elementary school student also regularly appears on Q13 Fox Morning News for weekly cooking

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segments during summer vacation.

That caught the attention of Mrs. Obama, who in her opening remarks, mentioned Amber's accomplishments. Later, President Obama surprised the attendees when he appeared, made a few remarks, then took the time to go around to each table and meet the winners.

"I will never forget sitting next to Mrs. Obama for the lunch and talking with her about all sorts of things. Meeting the President of the United States was amazing, too. Just being in the White House in general was kind of hard to believe!," Amber said in an email interview after her return from the other Washington. She attended the D.C. festivities accompanied by her mother, Yohko Kelley.

The Kids' State Dinner, actually a luncheon, featured some of the winning recipes. "I really liked the Zucchini Cornbread because they were small, bite-sized pieces, and they were absolutely DELICIOUS!," said Amber, adding, "but I also loved the Fun Mini Pizzas with Veggies and a Cauliflower Crust. It's gluten-free, but you can't even tell! It was so yummy!"

Mrs. Obama made sure to let the kids, and their parents, know that some of the foods served were meant to be eaten with their fingers, and that it was perfectly okay to do so in the White House. Later, the president told the guests they were lucky because she never lets him eat with his fingers at a State Dinner.

The Healthy Lunchtime Challenge & Kids' State Dinner invited a parent or guardian to work with their child ages 8-12 to create a lunchtime recipe that is healthy, affordable, original and delicious.

"Our Kids' State Dinner is one of my favorite events of the year, and the kid chefs who come from around the country never cease to impress and inspire me with their creativity and

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ingenuity," said First Lady Michelle Obama through a press release issued by the White House.

In support of Let's Move!, launched by the First Lady to help solve the problem of childhood obesity, each recipe adhered to the guidance that supports USDA's MyPlate (at ChooseMyPlate.gov) to ensure that the criteria of a healthy meal were met. Entries had to represent each of the food groups, either in one dish or as parts of a lunch meal, including fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins and low-fat dairy foods, with fruits and veggies making up roughly half the plate or recipe.

The Healthy Lunchtime Challenge, which was originated by Epicurious to promote healthy eating among America's youth, received more than 1,300 entries this year.

The full list of winners and recipes can be found online at recipechallenge.epicurious.com. The site has provided a downloadable cookbook with the winning recipes.