

NATION'S Restaurant News

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Living the dream

NRA celebrates industry's strivers with Faces of Diversity Awards • BY ELISSA ELAN

The National Restaurant Association recognized the owners of three independent restaurants and an on-site foodservice provider with its 2010 Faces of Diversity Awards.

The winners of the awards, which celebrate diversity within the restaurant industry, were announced during the association's annual Public Affairs Conference last month.

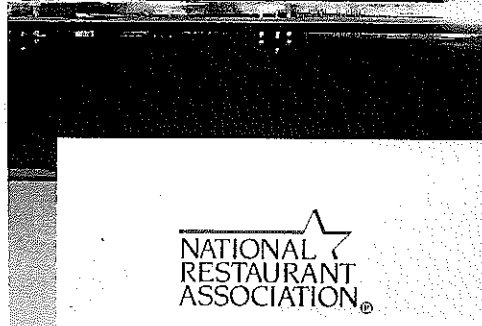
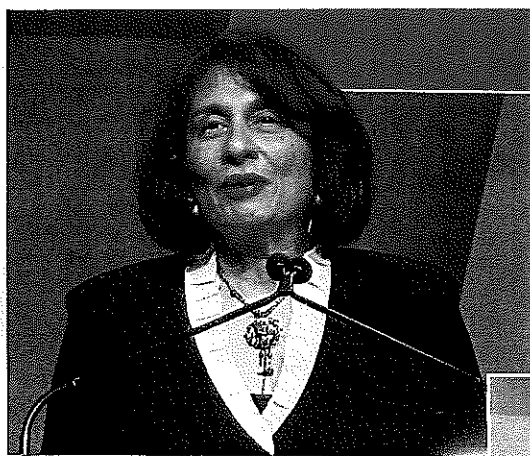
Awards were given in two categories: The American Dream Awards, which honor individuals from diverse backgrounds who have achieved success despite facing tough hurdles; and the Inspiration Award, which is given to a restaurant company that exhibits leadership and vision as an advocate of diversity and inclusion.

American Dream Awards went to Matilda and Joseph Novak, proprietors of Novak's Hungarian Restaurant in Albany, Ore.; Widjiono "Yono" Purnomo, owner-operator of Yono's in Albany, N.Y.; and Taki Sawi, owner of Santorini Greek Kitchen in Indianapolis. Sodexo USA, the Gaithersburg, Md.-based contract foodservice provider, won the Inspiration Award.

"It is our honor to recognize the winners of our 2010 Faces of Diversity Awards for their achievement and inspiration," said Dawn Sweeney, the NRA's president and chief executive. "Diversity is a key ingredient of our industry's current and future success."

This year's American Dream winners were chosen from a field of 15 nominees and selected by an independent committee of industry experts.

The Novaks endured years of hardship in their native Hungary during the 1940s and 1950s before fleeing in 1957 to the United States to avoid retribution for participating in a failed anti-communist uprising. Their



Above: Rohini Anand, global chief diversity officer, Sodexo Inc.



Taki Sawi, owner of Santorini Greek Kitchen in Indianapolis



ABOVE & TOP LEFT: PAUL FRUMKIN

daughter, Karen, now owns the restaurant, though the couple remains involved in Novak's operation.

"I'm honored to stand here before you and tell you what makes this country so great," Joseph Novak said upon receiving his award. "You can do it if you want to," he said, explaining that in

America anyone can succeed if they work hard and persevere.

Purnomo, who grew up in poverty in Indonesia, came to America in 1978 while working for the Holland America cruise line. Since purchasing his first restaurant in 1983, he has gone on to achieve some celebrity-

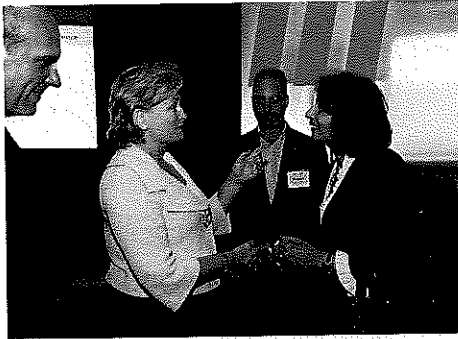
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Living the dream

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 chef fame, appearing on NBC's "Today" show and on the Food Network. He has cooked for a number of sold-out James Beard House events and also is a mentor to students interested in pursuing culinary careers.

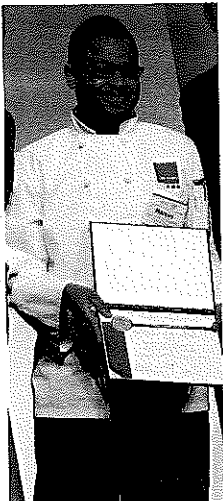
"I feel fortunate," he said. "Working hard and pursuing your dream is one of the many wonderful freedoms we enjoy in the United States."

Sawi, who left his native Egypt following the death of his parents, said he knew from the time he was 14 years old that he wanted to become a restaurateur. After marrying and moving to Indianapolis, he achieved his dream by opening a small



Above, left: former NRA chairman Michael Kaufman; Dawn Sweeney, NRA president and chief executive; NRA board member Michael Sternberg, in background; and Rohini Anand, global chief diversity officer, Sodexo Inc., who accepted the Inspiration Award on her company's behalf

Above, right: Joseph and Matilda Novak founded Novak's Hungarian Restaurant in Albany, Ore., after fleeing their native Hungary in 1957.



ABOVE & RIGHT: PAUL FRUMKIN
 Above: Scholarship recipient Marcus Efford-Singleton

Right, from left: Buffalo Wild Wings' Sally Smith, scholarship winner Ashanti Jimerson and Pete Popovich of PepsiCo Foodservice

restaurant, which he has expanded over the years.

"I came to this country and did what I have passion about," Sawi said at the ceremony. "This is the greatest country in the world."

Gaithersburg, Md.-based So-



dexo was honored for its integration of diversity and inclusion into its recruiting, employee development, mentoring, community involvement and supplier outsourcing practices.

Rohini Anand, senior vice president and global chief diversity officer for Sodexo, accepted the Inspiration Award on behalf of the company.

"Foodservice is the first point of employment for many people coming into the United States," she said. "We clearly recognize our commitment to diversity and inclusion, but our work has just begun. Our commitment remains steadfast."

In addition to the Faces of Diversity Awards, the NRA also recognized four culinary students with scholarships to help them pursue their educations and careers. This year's scholarship winners were Marcus Efford-Singleton, who is enrolled at Robert Morris University in Chicago; Frederick Howard, a student at Johnson & Wales University in Providence, R.I.; Ashanti Jimerson, who attends Howard University in Washington, D.C.; and Mario Robles, a student enrolled in San Diego University's Hospitality and Tourism Management Program.

PepsiCo Foodservice is a founding partner and sponsor of the Faces of Diversity Awards program. ■

celan@nra.com