

The Providence Journal

DINING

RI chef makes history winning James Beard award



[Gail Ciampa](#)

The Providence Journal

Published 5:19 a.m. ET June 6, 2023 | Updated 9:09 a.m. ET June 6, 2023

Sherry Pocknett made some culinary history last night. Pocknett, who cooks Indigenous cuisine from her Wampanoag culture at her Sly Fox Den Too restaurant in Charlestown, took home the James Beard Foundation Award for Best Chef Northeast.

Chef Pocknett was a first-time nominee for the Beard award. They are considered the Oscars of the food world. She joins Al Forno's Johanne Killeen and the late George Germon, as the only Rhode Islanders to win the prestigious, regional best chef award. They won in 1993.

She accepted the award with graciousness and tears, saying she never expected the honor. Dressed in Native American clothing, she told the audience she has cancer. But added that she is almost through it. She spoke of family, too.

The culinary media company Eater streamed the awards live from the Lyric Opera.

No reason not to dine al fresco: Restaurants in RI with a waterfront view

More: Explore Rhode Island's rich Native American history and culture, all in one day

Pocknett opened her Sly Fox Den Too, post COVID-19 in 2021 at 4349 South County Trail. The restaurant grew out of her Connecticut-based catering business. She focuses on local, seasonal ingredients. She grew up on Cape Cod, a member of the Mashpee Wampanoag tribe. Her extended family ran The Flume restaurant, and she previously worked as food and beverage director at the Mashantucket Pequot Museum & Research Center.

She was a finalist with four other New England chefs competing for the award. Two were from Boston: Valentine Howell of Krasi and Yisha Siu of Yunnan Kitchen. Two were based

in Connecticut: Christian Hunter of Community Table in New Preston and Renee Touponce of The Port of Call in Mystic.

Aunt Carrie's in Narragansett and Olneyville New York System in Providence have been honored with Beard awards as "America's Classics."

Who won at the James Beard Awards 2023?

Outstanding Chef: Rob Rubba, Oyster Oyster, Washington, D.C.

Outstanding Restaurant: Friday Saturday Sunday, Philadelphia

Best New Restaurant: Kann, Portland, Oregon

Outstanding Restaurateur Ellen Yin, High Street Hospitality Group (Fork, a.kitchen + bar, High Street Philly, and others), Philadelphia

Outstanding Hospitality: The Quarry, Monson, Maine

Emerging Chef: Damarr Brown, Virtue, Chicago

Outstanding Pastry Chef or Baker: Margarita Manzke, République, Los Angeles

Outstanding Bakery: Yoli Tortilleria, Kansas City, Missouri

Outstanding Wine and Other Beverages Program: Ototo, Los Angeles

Outstanding Bar: Bar Leather Apron, Honolulu

Best Chef: Midwest: Itaru Nagano and Andrew Kroeger, Fairchild, Madison, Wisconsin

Best Chef: Mountain: Kris Komori, KIN, Boise, Idaho

Best Chef: South: Natalia Vallejo, Cocina al Fondo, San Juan, Puerto Rico

Best Chef: Northeast: Sherry Pocknett, Sly Fox Den Too, Charlestown, Rhode Island

Best Chef: Southwest: Andrew Black, Grey Sweater, Oklahoma City

Best Chef: Southeast: Terry Koval, The Deer and the Dove, Decatur, Georgia

Best Chef: Mid-Atlantic: Chutatip "Nok" Suntaranon, Kalaya, Philadelphia

Best Chef: New York State: Junghyun Park, Atomix, New York

Best Chef: California: Justin Pichetrungsi, Anajak Thai, Sherman Oaks, California

Best Chef: Northwest and Pacific: Vince Nguyen, Berlu, Portland, Oregon

Best Chef: Texas: Benchawan Jabthong Painter, Street to Kitchen, Houston, Texas

Best Chef: Great Lakes: Tim Flores and Genie Kwon, Kasama, Chicago

What are the James Beard Awards?

What is a Michelin star? Here's what to expect at a restaurant with the badge of honor.

The awards recognize "exceptional talent in the culinary and food media industries, as well as a demonstrated commitment to racial and gender equity, community, sustainability, and a culture where all can thrive," the organization said in a release in January.

The list of semifinalists, which came out in January, included dozens of chefs and restaurants from across the country in 23 categories. Nominees in the national and regional categories ran the gamut from established chefs and fine-dining restaurants to newcomers and mom-and-pops. A new category, outstanding bakery, was added this year. Finalists were revealed on March 29.

Contributing: Morgan Hines and Charles Trepany