Area students help select Bake-Off finalists

By UW-Stout News Bureau

MENOMONIE — The contestant who wins the $1 million prize in the Pillsbury Bake-Off may owe a small debt of gratitude to a UW-Stout student.

Four UW-Stout students, all food systems and technology majors, were among six interns last summer who represented the first stop — the Pillsbury Bake-Off test kitchens — in the 10-month-long judging process.

Testing recipes daily from late May to early August was hard work, said one of the UW-Stout interns, Catherine Earp of Apple Valley, Minn.

“When people would ask what my schedule was like on a typical day, I would say, ‘Imagine making two Thanksgiving meals and then going back and writing about everything you did,’ ” Earp said.

Tens of thousands of recipes were entered in the 45th annual baking contest. Judges narrowed that list to between 500 and 600 recipes, which in turn were made by the student interns and two staff members.

After the interns prepared the entries according to the entrants’ directions, a professional panel tasted and further evaluated them. Bake-Off contest judges then narrowed the list to 100 finalists.

The contest finals began Sunday in Orlando, Fla. The grandprize winner will be announced at 9 a.m. today on “The Martha Stewart Show,” which airs on the Hallmark channel.
Interns had their own test kitchens and all the food and equipment they needed to make recipes. They shared an assistant and had other professional assistance in the test kitchens, part of General Mills headquarters in Golden Valley, Minn.

“Our days were busy with hot ovens, sizzling pans and timers beeping all around you. Sometimes I would be in the middle of four different recipes and would need to plan how I was going to have my hot food hot and my cold foods cold, all at the same time,” Earp said.

The other UW-Stout interns were Rachel Albin of St. Paul; Michelle Olson of Maple Grove, Minn.; and Rebecca Trudeau of Sheboygan.

“It was a lot of getting to know the recipes, which came in from all over the U.S. They were so creative and easy to make. We made food all day long,” Olson said.

“It was so important to get the recipes spot-on because someone is going to get $1 million,” she said.

Olson, who will graduate in May, called the Pillsbury experience a “dream internship. It’s what we all love to do.”

Earp graduated last May and is an event coordinator for Kowalski’s Catering in Minneapolis. The internship helped prepare her for her career by training her to multitask while preparing food, she said.

“I think the most beneficial skill I learned from the Bake-Off is how to do multiple things at once,” Earp said. “Whether I was reading a recipe, prepping for the next one or pulling cookies out of the oven, I enjoyed every minute of it.”