

California Culinary Academy Chef Instructor Keeps Cool at International Ice Art Championships

After braving below-freezing temperatures for hundreds of hours over two weeks, California Culinary Academy (CCA) Chef Instructor Mark Davis returns to San Francisco with a silver medal for his participation in this year's world ice-carving competition held in Fairbanks, Alaska.

Davis' winning multi-block sculpture, titled "Swimming Lessons," competed against 18 other entries in the "realistic" category and featured a 20-foot-tall sea turtle and her brood in an underwater scene. Working with regular carving partner Ed Winslow and a team from Mongolia, Davis molded 40,000 pounds of ice into a breathtaking carving over the course of five days. The team took more than 70 hours to complete its piece, working through snowstorms and enduring temperatures as low as -4°F. "The work was intense," Davis says, "but the end result made it all worthwhile."

The inspiration for "Swimming Lessons" came from the team's Mongolian partners, though it was Davis' formidable engineering and artistic skills that allowed the group to execute its vision. Included in the sculpture were several perfect spheres, largely considered to be the most difficult shape to accomplish in ice carving.

In addition to the multi-block competition, Davis worked with Winslow on a single-block sculpture titled "Siena." That piece depicted a woman carrying a basket full of food and wine, representing a bountiful California harvest. "We were inspired by the generosity of nature in California," Davis says. "Plus, reminding us of our home state helped push the intense cold in which we were working out of our minds."

Davis has competed in Ice Alaska seven times since 1994. This year's win represents his second silver medal in the annual world competition. He also has collected three bronze medals over the years. In addition to their participation in Ice Alaska, Davis and Winslow have competed twice in the renowned Harbin, China, ice competition. Davis was on the United States Ice Carving Team in both the Nagano 1998 and the Utah 2002 Winter Olympics.

Davis resides in Truckee, Calif., and has worked for California Culinary Academy since 1991 as a chef instructor and formerly as its executive chef. He currently teaches garde manger to students in the school's Le Cordon Bleu Culinary Arts program.