

Lawrenceville boy, 11, shows culinary talents on 'MasterChef Junior'

Quani Fields culinary talents displayed on television

By Trevor McNaboe

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Though he's just 11, Quani Fields is very comfortable in the kitchen, so much so that he's started his own business venture selling baked goods. Thanks to those culinary skills, the Lawrenceville resident has added another line to his resume — TV star.

You can see Fields in action tonight, cooking in front of world-renowned chef Gordon Ramsey on the Fox show "MasterChef Junior." It's a dream come true for the Creekland Middle School student, who last week was one of 12 boys, and 24 contestants overall, to make the cut.

"It was really cool when I found out that I made it," Fields said. "I was really excited to make it to the next round. I want to keep making better things."

"MasterChef Junior" is a cooking show hosted by Ramsey that begins with 40 contestants between the ages of 8 and 13. Each week the field is pared down as the young chefs compete against each other.

One episode into the competition, Fields has already drawn the attention of Ramsey, who is known for his rants and for challenging the chefs. During that episode, Ramsey made a comment about Fields deciding to make cupcakes for an elimination round.

"... I just told (judges) Joe (Bastianich) and Christina (Tosi) that nobody would dare make cupcakes," Ramsey said. "Quani, are you crazy?"

Fields replied with a simple "yes," then got the last laugh when the judges enjoyed his cupcakes and he passed the challenge. He said cupcakes are his favorite thing to make, but his passion for cooking started long before his television debut.

About two years ago, he got started after watching his grandmother and mother make delicious dishes.

"When I was younger, my mom and grandma liked to cook, and I wanted to cook with them," Fields said. "It really became something that was fun for me that I just couldn't stop doing."

Fields' interest in cooking was further developed at classes taught by the Atlanta Midtown Young Chefs Academy. At age 9, Fields said he remembers preparing a spaghetti dinner for his soccer team — a recipe he learned to make at a Young Chefs Academy class.

A year later he turned his cooking hobby into a business called Quani's Baked Goods.

"I would show up at the soccer field and sell cookies, brownies and soft pretzels," Fields said.

Fields said marshmallow surprise cookies and strawberry ganache brownies are two of his top sellers.

To earn a spot on "MasterChef Junior," Fields had to go through an open casting call held in January in Atlanta. He did well enough there to be one of 20 junior chefs chosen to go to California to film the show. It's been a heady experience, but Fields said he does get a little homesick.

"It's fun being out here, but sometimes I miss my family and friends that are back home," Fields said.

In the opening episode, Fields dubbed himself a triple threat for his ability to cook, bake and play soccer.

Soccer is a very important part of Fields' life, so much so that he says his love for soccer is equal to his love for cooking.

On a normal day, Fields said he enjoys playing a variety of sports with his classmates, brother and sister, and with his friends outside of school. When he's tired of playing sports, he also makes videos on his YouTube channel.

The winner of "MasterChef Junior" will earn \$100,000.