



Building Community With Competition: Inside the SP House Cup

By George Lan,
3-South Hall Councilor

In mid-October, SidPac kicked off its third House Cup with its annual pizza-making contest. According to the website, the House Cup is "a friendly, inter-hall competition in which teams compete for fun, prizes, and 'eternal glory' (but mostly for fun) in a wide variety of events throughout the year." As a veteran of many vicious House Cup clashes, I want to disabuse any residents of this notion. Sure, baking pizzas is fun, and collecting canned food goes toward a great cause, but the main motivation that drives House Cup competitions is the desire to thoroughly best your fellow halls in arbitrary measures of skill, commitment, and general ingenuity. What follows is a somewhat-fictionalized, behind-the-scenes account of the October pizza-making contest and the November canned food drive.

The story began in mid-September. During the monthly house meeting, this fall's House Cup Schedule was first unveiled. Almost immediately afterwards, all the hall-councilors (HCs) be-

gan plotting their plan of attack. Ahmed Helal, the 4-North HC, had big shoes to fill; last year's 4-North HC, Nadia Cheng had taken first place in last year's House Cup, and Ahmed hoped to continue the legacy; luckily, he had several House Cup veterans amongst his residents to lead the charge. Vivek Singh, the 6th floor HC, saw his hall's strength in its sheer size; due to SP's odd floor arrangements, the 6th floor has the most residents of any hall. In contrast, Burcu "B" Erkmen, the 1st floor HC, held the exact opposite view – for House Cup events that were scored proportional to a hall's size, having the fewest number of residents was a boon.

The first event of the year was the pizza-making contest, which was held on Wednesday, October 13. Each hall was provided up to two fresh pizza doughs from Bertucci's, a \$30 budget, and the challenge to create the most creative, tantalizing, and delicious pizzas ever. The only rule was that the name of each entry must begin with the letters "S" and "P" (e.g. sausage and pepperoni).

This year's event drew 11 par-

ticipating halls, a record-high. Unbeknownst to most, however, it also generated a record-high amount of behind-the-scenes smack-talk. From the SP gym to the front door lobby to the 1 AM potentially-inebriated e-mail, I was on both the giving and receiving end of many taunts worthy of inclusion in the bad-puns hall-of-fame. "Our pizza is going to blow you away so much, there's going to be no pizza you left [sic]." In the week leading up to the event, Ahmed Helal – the 4-North HC and dessert-master- confidently claimed that he had some special ingredients up his sleeve. Indeed, his culinary imagination did not disappoint – his hall's two pizzas – a spinach/duck combo and a meticulously-arranged fruit desert pie- took second place in the contest. Holly Johnsen – the 2-South HC and a Japanese-food-connoisseur- decided to infuse her recipes with some exotic ingredients; most residents thought the bonito flakes (Katsubushi) were an interesting touch, but they were less open to the new tastes. 2-South had a solid 5th place finish.

As a member of the first place
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(woot!) 3-South pizza team, I can pinpoint three key factors to our victory. First, since pizzas were to be judged based on creativity, taste, and presentation, we put a lot of effort into a) how we designed our pies (our butternut squash pizzas spelled out S & P with two different colorings), and b) how we named them; our overall theme was "Summer's Past," and we gave cute titles to each of our individual pizzas, such as "Sweetie Pi" and "Sublime by Pui." Second, the 3-South team was just stacked with amazing talent. From super-SidPac volunteer Jit Hit Tan to brunch co-chair Birendra Jha to the culinarily-inspired Pui-Wa Li, we had some all-star chefs. Third, we just did more with more – unsatisfied with having just two pizza doughs, we invested some of that \$30 budget into a plain focaccia loaf from Cosi's, which we then used to create a Spinach and Poulet pizza. We also badgered George Tucker, the inter-hall coordinator and organizer of the House Cup Events, into giving us an extra pizza dough for free. Some would call that an unfair advantage, but that's the framing of losers and whiners; I call that resourcefulness. Don't settle - you never know what you could get if you don't ask.

While there was much rejoicing in 3-South following our victory, other halls were not so pleased with the results. Ivan Chan, the 9th floor HC whose floor had a finished respectable third in the pizza-making contest, threatened, "I'll get you next time, 3-South. Victory will be mine. Muahaha." Brian Spatocco, the 3-North HC, was also very blunt

about his displeasure – "You better wipe that cheesy smile off your face because we're going to flatten you next time, 3-South." Disappointed by his hall's lack of participation (he had been away at a conference during the pizza-making contest, and several of his residents had defected to other halls' cooking teams), Brian vowed to crush the competition at the next hall event.

That hall event was the November canned food drive. On Nov. 10 and Nov. 17, during the weekly coffee hours, residents were encouraged to donate canned food items on behalf of their respective halls. Bins were set up to track individual hall donations, and halls would be judged by the number of pounds-per-resident they amassed in donations. All collected donations would go to the Greater Boston Food Bank.

During the first week, Andrew Lai and 5-North jumped out to a strong lead (51 pounds), buoyed by the contributions of the housemasters Roger and Dottie Mark (some HCs complained this was unfair because the Marks' have a fully-stocked kitchen pantry, but again, that's whiner talk). Overall, the halls collected 182 pounds. Yet, this was only the beginning. Many hall councilors were clearly holding back– trying to mislead others about the extent of their depraved, competitive generosity.

Privately to their residents, hall-councilors were pulling out all the stops. Yes, there were the usual rounds of electronic and personal taunts, but people were putting money where their mouths were. Many HCs offered

Courtesy of SP Photofile Committee



Team 3-South and their collection of Summer's Past pizzas (L-R: Pui-Wa Li, George Lan, Birendra Jha, Jit Hin Tan).

to collect cans in their rooms in case residents could not attend coffee hour. Others went one step further – offering to purchase cans on behalf of their residents, who could pledge to pay the HCs back. Brian Spatocco, the 3-North HC, made one of the boldest promises ever, offering to match every can his residents donated with two cans of his own. His secret strategy? Costco, bulk-size cans, and bulk-quantity savings. Others, such as Ivan Chan, the 9th floor HC, appealed to their residents' sense of compassion by strongly emphasizing the tangible benefits these donations would provide to the hungry this winter. Still others, such as Ahmed Hallel, the 4-North HC, tried to get the most bang for their buck; as one of the HCs who offered to purchase cans on behalf of their residents, Ahmed strategically

bought low-cost, high-weight items such as soup broth and flour. (To his credit, those items are very useful non-perishable goods for food bank clients because such items are efficient "meal-expanders.") Ahmed further stretched his residents' dollars by hunting for weekly loss-leaders at the local Shaw's supermarket and consulting some online forums for grocery deals [slickdeals.net/forums/ and www.pennyexperiment.com/].

While several halls donated large amounts of food (9th floor took third place with 173.8 total pounds of food donated, or 3.22 pounds per resident, 5-North

took fourth place with 122.5 total pounds of food donated, or 2.45 pounds per resident), this competition quickly became an arms race between 3-North and 4-North. This was self-evident when Ahmed and Brian entered the SP MP room with 3 shopping carts each, filled to the brim with food. 3-North ultimately finished second, donating 403.2 pounds of food, or 7.61 pounds per resident. Brian's Costco strategy was no match for Ahmed's wheeling-and-dealing – 4-North donated an unbelievable 463.2 pounds of food, or 8.27 pounds per resident.

In total, over the two coffee hours, SidPac collected 1496

pounds of food, which will all be donated to the Greater Boston Food Bank [http://www.gbfb.org/]. That, in itself, is amazing and a testament to the kind of real-world, readily-measurable impact the House Cup has.

Yet, participating in such lofty accomplishments are bitter-sweet afterthoughts for the halls that failed to place in the most recent event. Instead, we look to the next event in this year's House Cup – the December Gingerbread House-Making Contest. Or, as some of us like to call it, redemption.



Courtesy of SP Photofile Committee

The 8th floor team proudly shows off their pizzas Spicy Pumpkin and Steak and Potatoes (L-R: John Issa, Eric Newton)

Pizza made by Benzong (Robin) Zhao from 2-South
 Ingredients: 1. Spanish Ham 2. Arugula 3. Cherry Tomatos
 Inspiration: Got the recipe from a family friend that owns an Italian restaurant in Shanghai
 How long: 30 minutes

Its a thin crusted pizza so making the dough as thin as possible is very important.



Pizza made by Chen Lu from 2-North (picture above) Floor 2 North's pizza was inspired by the thin crust pizza from Berkeley, California. The key ingredients in the pizza are thin, hand tossed dough covered in garlic olive oil. We made the pizza in the shape of a yin yang to represent SPirituality. The red side had bacon, chicken parmesan, onions, and tomato sauce. The white side had mozzarella, feta, and goat cheese with mushrooms.



Sidney-Pacific: A Giving Community

By Chelsea He,
Chair of the Halls



Courtesy of SP Photofile Committee

House Contest - Canned Food Donation
(L-R: George Lan, Chelsea He, Tim Curran, Amy Bilton).

Just in time for the holiday season, the second round of 2010-2011 Sidney-Pacific House Cup was a Canned Food Drive, which challenged residents to step up for a great cause. True to the S-P spirit, the residents answered the call in extraordinary fashion, with an incredible outpouring of kindness and generosity.

During Coffee Hour on November 10 and November 17, boxes were set up to collect food donations for each hall. Residents streamed by to show their support, whether with a few cans or a few dozen. In the span of just eight days, we collected an astounding 1496 pounds of food – that's 2.16 pounds per S-P resident! All donations will go to the Greater Boston Food Bank, where they will undoubtedly

make a huge difference to many families in our community. For a recap of the event, visit the House Cup website [http://s-p.mit.edu/about_sp/house_cup.php].

Special recognition goes out to the hall councilors, who have once again demonstrated their tremendous dedication to the S-P and the greater Boston community by leading their halls in this initiative (for an insider's perspective, see George Lan's take – "Building Community With Competition: Inside the SP House Cup").

Thank you to everyone who took part in the Canned Food Drive. With this event, we showed what is possible when an entire community comes together to help others in need. I, for one, could not be prouder to call S-P my home.

Upcoming Events!

Don't miss them!!

- 11/24 Housemaster's Thanksgiving Dinner
- 11/30 Documentary Viewing
- 12/1 House Cup: Gingerbread House-Making Contest
- 12/4 Peabody Essex Museum Trip
- 12/5 Christmas Tree Trimming
- 12/5 SP/Ashdown Brunch
- 12/7 House Council Meeting
- 12/13 Sidney Pacific Lecture Series

Sidney Pacific Speaker

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The Speaker is published on a monthly basis to serve the needs of the Sidney Pacific Graduate Community. Submissions of articles, photos, events, and other items of interest can be sent to:
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