

Best Young Bread Baker awarded \$10k grant 21 November 2019



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A Nelson plant bread baker has won the 2019 Young Bread Baker of the Year Award after a rigorous round of theoretical and practical testing.

Matthew McMahon, a Shift Co-ordinator at Quality Bakers in Nelson, was awarded a \$10 000 research grant for his efforts, which he will use to travel to overseas baking conferences and superplants.

Matthew was taking part for the second time in the Young Bread Baker of the Year. He's been refining his skills since he competed last year, and came back with practical experience and a relaxed attitude. But, he says, the competition was very different to last year, in both the theory and the practical elements.

Having been with Goodman Fielder for seven years and achieved a Level 4 Plant Bakery qualification, his academic ability and knowledge of baking science gave him a solid base to work from. "The big difference for me this year was to use all the available time and to make a much bigger range of products. I was aiming to be more creative and do something more complex this time," says Matt. "I wanted to show the judges what I've learned over the past year. Overall I was really happy with the product I made."

Rhys Harvey of Auckland bakery Daily Bread was awarded a \$5000 research scholarship for Product Excellence for his outstanding performance in the practical aspect of the competition. Rhys hopes to head to New York with his research scholarship to do a short course at a world-renowned baking school.

The competition r



requires entrants to demonstrate their ability in three areas: a five-hour practical baking exercise in which they bake a variety of bread-based products, a 90-minute exam which tests their theoretical knowledge of baking technology, and a presentation on a given research topic.

Judges Everard Wijdeveld, Ralph Thorogood and Grant Inns were impressed with the range of innovative products made during the competition, saying the whole group had shown real potential as future leaders in the industry.

Judging Co-ordinator Tania Watson of the New Zealand Association of Bakers says the aim of the competition is to find bakers with potential whose talents can be nurtured through mentoring and development opportunities, and to reward the best newly qualified young bread baker in the country. "It's always good to have both plant and craft bakeries represented as they bring different strengths to the competition. This year we had an even number of each."

The Young Bread Baker of the Year is sponsored by the New Zealand Association of Bakers and is designed to promote excellence in people emerging from their training.

More about Matthew McMahon

After completing a BSc in Biological Sciences at Canterbury University, Matthew came back to his home town of Nelson and took up a temporary job carrying out distribution for Goodman Fielder. That temporary job ended up lasting four years. In that time, he observed the baking production area and realised he had a keen interest. After a year away in Fiji with his wife, they returned to Nelson and he took up an apprenticeship with Goodman Fielder.

Matthew says his degree has given him a deeper understanding of the processes and science behind baking, and a distinct advantage when trying to work out what is happening with products. He says it also makes writing technical reports and continuous improvement plans a lot easier. Matt is fascinated by bakery science, particularly the interaction of ingredients.

Involved in production scheduling and rostering for the bread and pastry lines, Matthew loves the variety of the role. He has also learned a lot about managing staff, and says a gentle approach works well with most people. He entered the Young Bread Baker of the Year 2018 Competition after talking with three good friends about it – they had all taken part in the past and saw the very real benefits.

More about Rhys Harvey

Growing up in a small town, Rhys says he had a choice between working on an onion farm or at the local New World. After a few months on the onion farm it was off to New World to stack shelves, but the instore baker nabbed him instead and after being offered an apprenticeship at Bakers Delight in Pukekohe he never looked back. He qualified in 2012 with a Level 3 and in 2018 with his Level 4. He's worked at Bread and Butter and Best Ugly Bagels as head baker, and done a stint tutoring, but an offer from a friend opening a new bakery was too good to turn down and he's now head baker at Daily Bread in Auckland with an apprentice under his wing.

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For more information, please contact Tania Watson – Judging Coordinator

New Zealand Association of Bakers

E: tania@bakingresearch.org.nz

M: 021 1659949

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