

Shaka Bowl chef Kiersten Gormeley brings ‘Chopped’ champion title home to Hudson County

By Teri West | May 21 2021



Kiersten Gormeley, a co-owner of Shaka Bowl in Hoboken, is now a “Chopped” champion.
(Reena Rose Sibayan | *The Jersey Journal*) EJA

It had been her dream since third grade, so she didn’t mess around.

Appearing on Food Network’s “Chopped” meant constant practice and tests beforehand at home in Jersey City for Shaka Bowl co-owner and chef Kiersten Gormeley.

Then she arrived to set and found out her competitors were three men, all her senior, with lengthy resumes in the restaurant industry. Gormeley, who never attended culinary school, proceeded to beat them.

“It’s pretty humbling,” Gormeley said. “I’ve wanted this my whole life.”

Gormeley, 29, won Tuesday’s taco-themed episode of the Food Network cooking competition in which she had a limited amount of time to compose a multi-course meal.

She is the head chef at Hoboken’s two Shaka Bowl locations, the first of which she opened with her sister Krista Gormeley in 2016.

The restaurants serve Hawaiian-inspired healthy eats, including tacos, and though Gormeley was scouted for “Chopped,” her training is mostly informal.

She had wanted to be a chef for much of her life and worked alongside talented mentors for years, Gormeley said.

“I love the joy that (food) brings other people,” she said.

To prepare for “Chopped,” she practiced in her kitchen, asked other chefs for advice, watched virtual classes and would even quiz herself in the grocery store.

“I went to the grocery store and would look at random ingredients and say, ‘What would you do with this?’” Gormeley recalled.

The filming date for her episode was postponed twice due to COVID-19, but eventually happened in November. She recalls feeling intimidated by her competitors but confident that she had prepared enough.

Now, she joins the ranks of Hudson County Chopped winner Claude Lewis, who owns Freetown Road Project in Jersey City.

An extended stay in Hawaii during college was the sisters’ inspiration behind Shaka Bowl.

Surviving cancer at 23, however, also motivated Kiersten Gormeley to leap into entrepreneurship and build a healthy menu, she said.

“I turned vegetarian after that, which was the inspiration to make my restaurant super healthy,” Gormeley said. “I believe in the power of plants.”

Now, she and her siblings are ready to expand beyond Hudson County. They have plans to franchise in the Northeast and then further West, Gormeley said.

And with a Chopped win on her resume, Gormeley said she has even more confidence in herself.

“It proved to me I think I can inspire younger, especially women, chefs that you don’t need to go to school,” she said. “It’s all about what you make of yourself and what you make of your career.”



Kiersten Gormeley of Hoboken’s Shaka Bowl competing on Chopped. *Courtesy of Food Network*