

# 11 Maine chefs and restaurants named James Beard Award semifinalists

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By Meredith Goad Staff Writer

February 15, 2018



Eleven Maine chefs and restaurants were named semifinalists for the prestigious James Beard Foundation Awards on Thursday, including five chefs who are being considered for best chef in the Northeast.

Two of the Best Chef: Northeast semifinalists have been previously nominated. Ravin Nakjaroen of Long Grain in Camden has been on the list three times before, and Keiko Suzuki of Suzuki's Sushi Bar in Rockland was nominated for the third time this year. Newcomers on the list are Vien Dobui, chef/owner of Cong Tu Bot, a Vietnamese restaurant in Portland, and Erin French, the chef/owner of the Lost Kitchen in Freedom, which has received lots of national coverage in the past year. Krista Kern Desjarlais, who was a James Beard finalist in this same category in 2012 for her (now closed) Portland restaurant Bresca, was nominated for the Purple House in North Yarmouth, which she opened in December 2016.

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A half-dozen Mainers are scattered throughout the other categories. Most have been semifinalists before, but this year Back Bay Grill in Portland, owned by chef Larry Matthews and managed by Adrian Stratton, got a nod in the Outstanding Service category. [Cara Stadler](#), chef/owner of Tao Yuan in Brunswick and Bao Bao Dumpling House in Portland, is once again a semifinalist in the Rising Star Chef of the Year category, which is restricted to chefs 30 or younger who are “likely to make a significant impact on the industry for years to come.” This is the last year she will be eligible for this category.

Sam Hayward, co-owner and founding chef of Fore Street and Scales in Portland, is named once again in the Outstanding Chef category, which honors “a working chef in America whose career has set national industry standards and who has served as an inspiration to other food professionals.” He won Best Chef: Northeast in 2004. Hayward, [a pioneer in the local foods movement in Maine](#), has been up for the Outstanding Chef award several times over the years. Another perennial nominee is Chase’s Daily in Belfast, which is once again a semifinalist for Outstanding Restaurant.

Maine bakers are also represented again this year. Alison Pray, who co-owns Standard Baking Co. with her husband, Matt James, is a semifinalist once again for Outstanding Baker, a category that was added in 2015. And Ilma Lopez, co-owner of Piccolo and Chaval in Portland, is listed for Outstanding Pastry Chef.

The James Beard Foundation Awards are the most coveted in the restaurant industry. Anyone can nominate someone to be a semifinalist in 21 categories; this year, the semifinalists were chosen from more than 20,000 entries. The lists in each category will now go to an independent volunteer panel of more than 600 judges across the country – including restaurant critics, food editors and past winners – who will narrow it down to five finalists in each category. Finalists will be announced March 14.

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