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Yedei Esav V'Kol Yaakov (in Hebrew)

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*Af Hein Hayu BeOto HaNeis:
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METROWEST

Grated expectations

Hungry for fame, NJ 'gurgitator' sets sights on winning deli's latke-eating contest

by **Ron Kaplan**
NJJN Staff Writer

Joel "The Cannon" Podelsky is a man on a mission. He has his mind — and stomach — set on coming home with the trophy in the first-ever National Potato Latke Eating Competition, to be held Dec. 18 at Zan's Deli in Lake Grove, Long Island.

The Laurence Harbor resident is a relative newcomer to the world of competitive eating. He got into the "game" on the suggestion of a coworker. So far he's taken part in a handful of contests featuring a smorgasbord of such dishes as Italian subs, Irish corned beef, Jamaican "bun and cheese," and good old American hot dogs.

"I am capable of eating any type of food, except tuna fish," said Podelsky in an interview with *NJ Jewish News*.

Podelsky belongs to the Association of Independent Competitive Eaters (motto: "A competitive eating organization with a heart as big as its stomach"). Competitive eaters — sometimes known by the far-too-descriptive term "gurgitators" — come in all shapes and sizes. Podelsky, who is in his early 40s, stands six-feet tall and weighs in at 250 pounds. By comparison, Takeru "The Tsunami" Kobayashi, the "professional" speed-eater who has won the Nathan's Famous Fourth of July Hot Dog Eating Championships

for five consecutive years, is downright petite at five feet, seven inches and 131 pounds. Kobayashi holds the record of 53.5 franks downed in 12 minutes (including buns) in 2004.

Training methods vary. Some competitors drink large amounts of water or seltzer quickly in an effort to expand the stomach. "I don't believe in that. It's not natural for the body to absorb that much water," Podelsky said. He prefers to fast for 18 hours before a contest. "I don't practice. I just eat."

Podelsky, an admissions representative for the Katherine Gibbs School in Piscataway, puts on as much as 10 pounds during a competition but takes it off before the next one. He is not worried about how this might affect his health. "I don't eat like this every day,"



Joel "The Cannon" Podelsky, shown here at the NYS Royal Caribbean Bakery's Bun 'n' Cheese Eating Contest in July, has high hopes for a Dec. 18 latke-eating competition.

Photo by Debbie Hampson-Chapman

he said. In fact, he's actually pretty careful about what he ingests the rest of the time and, like a boxer, doesn't compete on a frequent basis.

AICE members take these "food fights" seriously. AICE follows "picnic rules": Foods are eaten the way they are customarily consumed. For example, hot dogs must be eaten with the bun, and eaters cannot submerge their food in water. AICE chair Arnie Chapman considers the latter practice "picnic profanity" and a desecration of the American icon known as the Hot Dog.

"Also we believe [picnic style] is more spectator-friendly and allows for the crowd to follow the action much easier," he said in an e-mail to *NJJN*.

Some contests are based on eating one item in the least amount of time; others have a time limit in which eaters consume as many of a particular item as possible.

Podelsky partakes in a Monday Night Football wings contest at an Aberdeen pub; the weekly winners will compete in a Super Bowl showdown for a \$1,000 cash prize. "I actually beat everybody [one night], but I got disqualified," he said. "I didn't take off all the meat from the bone. But I'm gonna try it again next week."

He said he's looking forward to the latke-fest. He boldly predicted he could down 20 four-inch potato pancakes within the allotted eight minutes; applesauce is optional.

He calls latkes "heritage food."

"It's meaningful for me," he said, joking that his Jewish background will give him an advantage in the Dec. 18 contest. His parents, who live in Iselin, are supportive of him, he said, but aren't crazy about some of the *treif* he has to eat when he competes.

"Joel represents what AICE is really all about: having fun and entertainment," Chapman said, offering a scouting report. "[H]e has the heart of a lion and a great sense of humor. Joel always gives 100 percent."

Referring to the Long Island event, Chapman said, "I told Joel that I believe a new Jewish prince of competitive eating could be crowned on the 18th and that the hopes of all Jewish people rest with him."

"No pressure."

For further information on the National Potato Latke Eating Competition, contact Chapman at 516-632-9794 or TexChap88@aol.com.

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