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## Seattle chef Tom Douglas celebrated at conference

By Nancy Leson

Seattle Times staff reporter

The Food Network made celebrity-chef superstars out of Emeril Lagasse and Mario Batali, catapulting their careers and helping promote their food products and kitchen equipment. But Seattle's own celebrity chef Tom Douglas doesn't need the Food Network. He's done a pretty good job marketing himself — with five highly touted restaurants, a bakery and catering company, cookbooks, a food-product line and a weekly radio show.



GREG GILBERT

At a symposium, chef Charlie Baggs, left, displays a variety of Alaska wild salmon, including king, coho, pink and sockeye.

Which is why, when nearly 1,000 food-industry professionals from around the nation sat down at the Research Chefs Association annual awards luncheon at the Seattle Sheraton Saturday, they ate a four-course meal "inspired by" Douglas.

It's why earlier in the day, several hundred of those corporate chefs, food scientists and proponents of Culinology — a marriage of the culinary arts and food technology — were served Starbucks before listening to Douglas speak during a panel discussion about Northwest cuisine. And it's why [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com) is set to manufacture an exclusive line of kitchen equipment, Pinzon by Tom Douglas, designed and promoted by the chef who put Northwest cuisine on the map.

### Taste of the Northwest?

But cooking with Tom Douglas' signature sauté pan doesn't mean your crab cakes will come out tasting like the ones you'll eat at the Dahlia Lounge. And cooking a Tom Douglas-inspired meal manufactured with the

assistance of companies such as Campbell's Soup, Kraft, Land O'Lakes and Halliburton, then transported to Seattle and plated in a hotel kitchen, doesn't exactly translate as a taste of the Northwest.

Translating a fine-dining chef's vision into a packaged-food product is part of the mission of the Research Chefs Association (RCA), whose tagline is "Defining the Future of Food." And it's a mission Douglas understands.

"There's a parallel universe between what local chefs are doing and what food manufacturers are doing for these hotel companies, or the war effort, or hospitals," Douglas said, speaking from his office above the Palace Kitchen as the lunch he "inspired" was served to RCA conference-goers.

"They're offering a food product that's easy for these institutions to put out in their banquet facilities." We can all pooh-pooh institutional and manufactured foodstuffs, he says, but "there are lots of levels of diners, people who eat at McDonald's and Applebee's. It's just fulfilling a different layer of the market."

With the rise in food and labor costs, "Everyone's looking for economies of scale," Douglas says.

### **Truly pristine seafood**

During the course of their four-day conference, RCA members had the opportunity to view new food products and technologies at Culinology Expo, a trade show held Friday at the Washington State Convention & Trade Center. And they spent time exploring Pike Place Market and area restaurants, eating the foods that have made our region famous, chief among them salmon.

It was seafood expert Jon Rowley who turned Seattle chefs on to truly pristine seafood, Douglas told the crowd yesterday during the panel discussion on Northwest cuisine.

Copper River king salmon? Yukon River king? You know those fish by their geographic names because Rowley made it so. In the past few years he convinced native Yukon River fishermen that their fabulously fatty salmon could fetch fabulous prices — if they'd only ice them down immediately upon capture, something he showed them how to do.

And Rowley echoed the sentiments of local chefs Thierry Rautureau, Holly Smith and Greg Atkinson, who noted that the bounty of Northwest seafood as well as locally procured meats, poultry, produce and foraged foodstuffs — plus a plethora of farmers markets, and customers willing to pay high prices for fresh, local

foods — are what make living and cooking in the Pacific Northwest such a joy.

Albert Helton, a corporate chef for the Smithfield Innovation Group in Buffalo Grove, Ill., clutched a signed copy of Greg Atkinson's "West Coast Cooking" after the panel discussion and said, "It's always nice to hear the insider's scoop. It's refreshing to get an insight to what's going on here." Though he regularly travels around the country teaching cooks how to use Smithfield's pork products, he came here to see for himself why "the Northwest is the best-kept secret." What does he think now?

"I had this great imagination of the Great Northwest woods — a kind of last refuge for the hippie generation who claimed this place for themselves." Hearing so much talk about local, seasonal and organic foods, and viewing the place through the lens of our chefs, he says, "They're into keeping the land pristine, into keeping this place as a local treasure."

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