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Norfolk's Great Hot Cocoa War of 2021 is upon us, and last year's champs are thirsty for more

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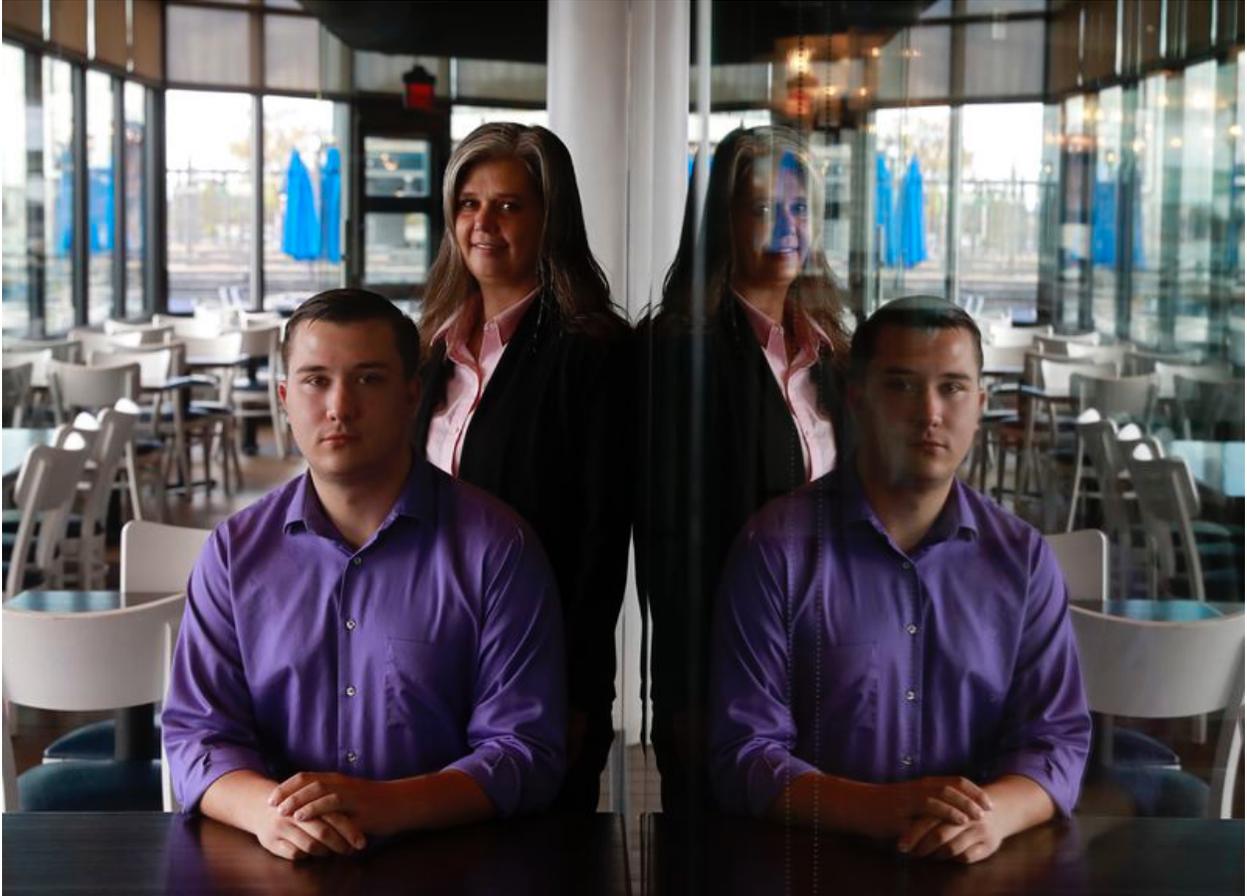


Andrew Lewis, assistant general manager of Stripers Waterside, prepares a salted bourbon caramel hot cocoa on Thursday, Nov. 18, 2021, in Norfolk, Va. Businesses will compete beginning Saturday in the 7th annual Great Hot Cocoa War. (Kaitlin McKeown/The Virginian-Pilot)

The staff at Stripers Waterside has strategized for weeks over which weapons to take to battle — a combination of milk chocolate and caramel, or marshmallows and cream? Or maybe a lavender syrup and the familiar Hershey's Kiss that will help them surpass their performance last year?

As they spent hours tasting and restarting, they demolished three sacks of sugar, a handful of chocolate bars and a bottle of vodka to prepare for this year's brawl — Norfolk's 7th Annual Great Hot Cocoa War.

General manager Melissa Lewis and her staff made quick work of last year's competition with a one-two punch of a peppermint patty-flavored concoction topped with whipped cream and a miniature chocolate bar, alongside a bourbon salted caramel hot cocoa.



Andrew Lewis, assistant general manager, and Melissa Lewis, general manager of Stripers Waterside, are seen at the restaurant in Norfolk. (Kaitlin McKeown/The Virginian-Pilot)

Lewis said they're still hungry to take home the gold.

"Like they said, this isn't just a competition. It's a war," Lewis said.

This week's contest is touting some heavy hitters including Vessel Craft Coffee, Hell's Kitchen, Zeke's and Capo Capo.

Lewis said her team is stirring in anticipation and eagerness to reclaim their championship prize — bragging rights and wrapping themselves in the gold-plated, black leather championship belt. The restaurant shows off last year's prize in a display case in front of the store.

Voters will visit each participating restaurant, sip and vote through Nov. 27; criteria include taste, presentation and creativity. Competitors submitted their recipes Nov. 18 and Lewis said they're not giving away their secrets until the competition begins.

"We're keeping our cards close to the chest."

Striper's assistant general manager Andrew Lewis said, "we know there's a lot of competition out there this year, but we're only focused on winning.

"We want to bring home the belt."

Scorecards can be picked up at any participating restaurant. Visit Downtown Norfolk's [Facebook page](#) for details and list of restaurants.

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A salted bourbon caramel hot cocoa, left, and peppermint patty hot cocoa, right, are pictured on Thursday, Nov. 18, 2021, at Stripers Waterside in Norfolk. (Kaitlin McKeown/The Virginian-Pilot)