

## Squashing the competition: Whittier duo makes sweet dishes

By Sandra T. Molina, Staff Writer

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William Casey, left, delivers his home grown Tahitian butternut squash to Chef Hugo Molina at Seta restaurant in Uptown Whittier on Friday October 22, 2010. Casey has been growing Tahitian squash for more than a dozen years and are used by Molina, head chef at Seta in Uptown Whittier. (SGVN/Staff Photo by Keith Durflinger)

WHITTIER - It's a match made in culinary heaven.

The working relationship between local grower William Casey, 50, of Whittier, and local chef Hugo Molina, 57, of Alhambra, has brought a smile to the lips of diners at Seta Restaurant, 13033 Philadelphia St.

"When I saw the squash, I knew I wanted to make some special dishes," Molina said.

It's not just any squash.

The Tahitian butternut squash grown by Casey the past three years are from about two feet to four feet long.

"It takes a lot of care to produce these," said Casey, whose home is covered with the homemade trellis where they grow.

He tried to get the farmers market and other local restaurants to try his vegetables.

There were no takers.

But Casey's futility became Molina's good fortune.

He is now the only chef in the area who has access to the sweet vegetable.

"I couldn't be more pleased because my clientele are the only ones who get to taste and enjoy the squash," Molina said. "I haven't been able to find the squash anywhere else."

He likes to go to farmers markets and out-of-the-way places looking for unique items for his recipes.

Molina's specialty dishes use the squash as its main ingredient in a soup and ravioli. He also bakes squash with brown sugar and cinnamon served warm with vanilla ice cream.

Unlike regular squash, which has a nutty taste, Molina said the Tahitian variety has a silky sweet taste and texture.

"It allows me to sweeten my dishes naturally," he said.

And Casey is the happy recipient of the chef's culinary talents.

"I couldn't come up with these wonderful tasting dishes on my own," he said.

[sandra.molina@sgvn.com](mailto:sandra.molina@sgvn.com)

562-698-0955, ext. 3029

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