

Philadelphia RESTAURANTS foobooz

Here Are the Philadelphians Going to the 2024 James Beard Awards

Philly has only one nominee for the foundation's Restaurant and Chef Awards, but three honorees in other categories.

by **JASON SHEEHAN BRZYSKI** • 4/3/2024, 3:27 p.m.



A James Beard Foundation Award. / Photograph by Eliesa Johnson

Way back in January, the James Beard Foundation released its long list of semifinalists for this year's Restaurant and Chef Awards. Philly did well, **snagging 10 semifinalists** across the board.

Well, this morning, the **JBF narrowed that list down to its finalists**, and in regards to the Restaurant and Chef Awards, we can't help but feel like Philly got snubbed. Of our 10 semifinalists, we only have one nominee. But Philly does have two honorees for the foundation's Leadership Awards. Add Vietnam Restaurant, who won an **America's Classics** Award a few weeks back, and we've got a total of four people who will be representing Philadelphia during the big James Beard Awards ceremony held on June 10th in Chicago.

Jesse Ito of Royal Izakaya is our lone nominee for the Restaurant and Chef Awards. He is up for Best Chef: Mid-Atlantic. I had one of the most memorable meals I've ever had here. It became **one of my favorite reviews ever**. And even though Jesse Ito has been nominated several times before, I'm really hoping this is going to be his year.

In addition to Ito's nomination, the foundation also announced the honorees for the Leadership Awards, which recognizes those who are "actively working to set standards that create more equitable, just, sustainable, and economically viable food systems for producers, workers, and consumers alike."

Among the honorees are Muhammad Abdul-Hadi of **Down North Pizza** who will receive an award for Industry Culture and Practices. His business model of employing formerly incarcerated individuals is not only sustainable, but also gives employees the opportunity to develop skills and experiences they can use to build their restaurant industry careers.

Christa Barfield of FarmerJawn is also an honoree and will be receiving an award for Emerging Leadership. In a country where there are so few Black women farmers, Barfield has been a grassroots leader in Philadelphia for years, so it's great to see her influence reaching others on a national level.

So that's that. We had a solid crop of semifinalists for the Restaurant and Chef Awards but, as sometimes happens, the JBF decided to go in a different direction. And while it's probably cold comfort for Dionicio Jiménez, Yun Fuentes, the crew at My Loup, the bar team at a.kitchen, Omar and Cybille from Honeysuckle Provisions, Dane DeMarco from Gass & Main, Carlos Aparicio, the king of cemitas, Randy Rucker from River Twice and the whole team at Isgro Pastries who managed to get a nod in their 120th year in operation, it really is an honor just to be in the running. It's better to win, sure. But being a semifinalist is cool, too.

Meanwhile, we'll be cheering on our honorees, and keeping our fingers crossed for Jesse Ito.