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Chemistry Students Play Role in Chili Pepper War

Winthrop University

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Quick Facts

- PuckerButt Peppers has relied on chemistry tests conducted every few months over the past five years by Professor Cliff Calloway and his undergraduate chemistry students to determine its peppers' heat.
- Calloway said jalapeno peppers come in at 10,000 units and habanero peppers at 250,000, while PuckerButt's hottest pepper has most recently tested at 1.5 million units.



Cliff Calloway

ROCK HILL, S.C. – A Winthrop faculty member and his students are planted squarely in a **global chili pepper war**.

As pepper enthusiasts search for the next hottest batch, the question remains: Who has the **world's hottest chili peppers**?

Ed Currie, CEO, founder and owner of **PuckerButt Pepper Company**, claims the title, saying he has developed insanely hot **Carolina Reaper peppers**. He has relied on chemistry tests conducted every few months over the past five years by **Professor Cliff Calloway** and his undergraduate chemistry students to determine his peppers' heat.

The students typically freeze dry a random sampling of several pounds of whole peppers. After grinding the dried pods, the students extract the contents with alcohol and run it through a **high performance liquid chromatography unit**. The results are used to see how much **capsaicin** is in the peppers to determine the Scoville Heat Unit.



Carolina Reaper peppers

Calloway said **jalapeno peppers** come in at 10,000 units and **habanero peppers** at 250,000, while **PuckerButt's hottest pepper** has most recently tested at 1.5 million units.

The reaction by some people when tasting such a hot pepper is to suffer from severe nausea and cramping. Others just wiggle in agony as they test their bodies' reaction to such intense heat, said Currie.

Helping the **Fort Mill, S.C.-based company** with their peppers is a venture embraced by several Winthrop departments. The company's director of finance, **Justin Lochel '07, '12**, worked on marketing plans for **PuckerButt** as an undergraduate and graduate student in his **business classes**. Accounting students have helped out and more recently, **biology students** are getting involved to help Currie develop what he says is a **new fruit** that will be "a culinary delight."

The national media has taken note of the **PuckerButt Pepper Company** and its application to Guinness World Records for hottest peppers. Read stories in the **New Yorker** and on **ABC Nightline**. Currie added that more media attention is on the way.

For more information, contact **Judy Longshaw**, news and media services manager, at 803/323-2404 or e-mail her at longshawj@winthrop.edu.

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