

Local chefs show off chili skills

Chili cook-off raises funds for Bend-La Pine athletic scholarships

By Dylan J. Darling / *The Bulletin*

Chili cook-off winners

A panel of three judges, all chili aficionados, selected winners at The Education Foundation for Bend-La Pine Schools' annual Chili Cook-Off.

Overall: 10 Barrel Brewing Company

Traditional: 10 Barrel Brewing Company

Exotic: Rockin' Daves Bagel Bistro

Spicy: The Phoenix

People's choice: Zydeco Kitchen + Cocktails

The list of potential ingredients for chili is limitless.

Elk, lamb, linguica — those are just the meats. Beans can range from massive white beans to tiny black beans to classic kidney beans.

Chefs from 15 restaurants in or near Bend on Sunday served up samplings of 16 chili concoctions, with myriad ingredients, at The Education Foundation for Bend-La Pine Schools' annual Chili Cook-Off at the Athletic Club of Bend.

"They are all amazing — really different flavors," said Rachelle Nickerson, 30, of Bend. Nickerson and her parents said they planned to try all of the chili creations during the four-hour, all-you-can eat event.

"We can't come up with the people's choice if we don't try them all," said Nickerson's stepmother, Wendy Lentz, 50, of Culver.

Along with the people's choice award, the chefs were vying for trophies in three categories: traditional, spicy and exotic.

Tickets to the fundraiser were \$10 for adults and children older than 12, and \$5 for kids ages 6 to 11. Children younger than 6 were free.

This year's event raised more than \$14,000, said Cheri Helt, a board member for the Education Foundation, who owns Zydeco Kitchen + Cocktails with her husband and is also a member of the Bend-La Pine Schools board.

Money raised by the event goes to athletic scholarships for middle and high school students in the district, Helt said. The scholarships — awarded to students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunches — help pay for the costs of participating in a school sport.

The Education Foundation's first chili cook-off was in 2008. Held at Scanlon's Restaurant, the event drew about 25 people, said Kip Heilman, general manager at the Athletic Club of Bend and the co-organizer of the cook-off with Helt.

It's grown since, moving into the club's gym to accommodate the chili-chomping crowd and serving as a benefit for the Education Foundation for the last three years. This year, about 1,000 people attended. Each year, the chefs in the competition push the limits of chili.

"We've had chukar (partridge) chili," Heilman said. "We've had steelhead chili. They just dig deep to find something creative."

The creativity extends to what goes on top of the chili along with what's in it.

Chefs from Pronghorn Club & Resort offered a maple cream, smoked cheddar cheese and fried onions to top their smoked brisket and bacon chili — while their counterparts from the 10 Barrel Brewing Company topped their hearty chili with jalapeño cheddar cornbread, green chili sour cream, fried leeks and a habañero cilantro oil.

The event's winner in the overall and traditional categories was the 10 Barrel Brewing Company for a chili that included Sinister Black Ale, sausage, pulled pork, beef tenderloin and bacon.

While not on the menu now, the chili may make an appearance at the pub, said Eric McElroy, executive chef at the pub.

"We are going to push it as a special," he said.

Brian Anderson, 38, of Bend, appreciated the creativity in each cup of chili he tried.

"It's like everything in Oregon," Anderson said. "It's artisan."

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