

Wine tasting event is more than just sipping the grape

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – What do more than two dozen wineries, a brewery, a coffeehouse, a bakery and more than a dozen restaurants have in common?

They were all in one room on a recent Friday pouring beverages and dishing up food to hundreds of supporters of Soroptimist International of South Lake Tahoe's at the service club's annual wine tasting.

I finally figured out how to have an even better time than usual and not end up needing to dry clean my outfit because it smelled like smoke. Spending the night at Harrah's Lake Tahoe, where the event was, was the solution to not enduring the cigarette stench of cabs that proliferate the South Shore.



The annual Soroptimist wine tasting at Harrah's is also about food and silent auction bidding.

Photos/Kathryn Reed

We've taken a cab to this event for a few years. It's safer. I just can't seem to figure out how much I consume at this event, so I don't want to be behind the wheel. But after last year, I said I would never take a cab in this town again and even if I trusted public transit, my vanity prevents me from getting on a bus in a skirt.

After this experience, I think Harrah's and Soroptimist (and all the service groups that have events at the casinos) should offer a package for their respective events. It would help the economy and make the roads safer.

With all the restaurants and wineries in this one room, it's impossible to sample them all. But partygoers can vote on their favorite, with the winner receiving a plaque that night.

Best Restaurant went to Zephyr Cove Resort. Chef Anthony Lujan created coconut shrimp with a sweet Thai chili sauce. Best Winery went to Macchia.

All of the restaurants are from the South Shore, while the wineries hail from throughout California, including El Dorado, Sonoma and Napa counties, as well as the Paso Robles area.

The vegetarian options are always scarce, so I tend to eat a big lunch before the event. But a nice surprise this year was the abundance of bread Sugar Pine Bakery brought. I had my share and a few other people's.

It's one of those nights where conversations never seem to be completed because just as you get started talking with one person someone else you know walks up. That's also the fun part of the soiree – catching up with people who you haven't seen in a while, hanging with friends, and seeing business associates in a different context.

The thousands of dollars raised from sales of the \$65 tickets, multiple silent auction tables and raffle goes back to the community to projects helping women and girls. Here are some

of the recipients who have received money from SISLT.

I always find it interesting when people who are the high bidders say they “won” the silent auction item. I took my “winnings” up to the comfy room, thinking more wine was needed.

Housekeeping at Harrah’s graciously brought up a wine opener. Apparently we had had our fill because neither of us could finish another glass.

The sweet potato fries are worth ordering from room service to help absorb the wine. (I have a French fry problem; some may call it an addiction – but that’s another story.)

It had been several years since I had stayed at Harrah’s. The room was much nicer than what I had remembered – tastefully decorated and spacious – with a partial view of Lake Tahoe. Sunrise hitting the mountains beyond MontBleu was something I don’t see out my bedroom window.

Four things that are somewhat minor but scored major points with both of us were: 1) not being able to smell smoke when stepping off the elevator, 2) having a thermostat that was accurate, 3) a heating system that is silent, and 4) having a shampoo-conditioner-soap dispenser instead the wasteful tiny plastic bottles.

The next morning meant needing to go out for breakfast. We walked over to Heavenly Village to eat at Driftwood Café – our first time to do since it moved from the other side of the street. It was as good as we had remembered.

The breakfast-lunch eatery has some different things than other restaurants in the area – like quiche, ugly fries (grilled potatoes, green onions, mushrooms with melted cheddar), as well as Bloody Mary’s and carafes of mimosas.

I had the Huevos Del Driftwood (\$8.95), but probably could

have gotten the half order. Sue had the Basic American Fare (two eggs, potato pancake or home fries, toast) for \$7.25. Javier was an incredible waiter – try too sit in his section.

Staying the night at Harrah's made for the best Soroptimist wine tasting event yet. This could be habit forming.

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