

Foodies sample their way through Sierra edibles



Patrick Harrity with Cold Water Brewery preps his dessert plate at Sample the Sierra. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

Beer with bread pudding. Chickpeas as a main ingredient in the entrée round of the chefs' challenge. Wine that wouldn't stop flowing.

This and a whole lot more is what Sample the Sierra is all about.

The eighth annual food pairing was a celebration of local restaurants, regional foods and adult libations, interspersed with artisans. Bijou Community Park in South Lake Tahoe was full of people enjoying themselves Sept. 16 – what with the

event selling out.

This culinary extravaganza showcases food grown in the region, local chefs cooking with it and El Dorado County adult beverage makers.

“It’s like Costco, but better. There is no pressure to buy,” said Danielle Cvitanich of South Lake Tahoe. “It’s great. We get to try all of these local vendors.”

This was the first year she and her husband, Joel, have been to Sample the Sierra.

They were partial to MoonHouse BrewHouse’s Cuban with its lemon-limey flavors that was paired with a rum sampler.



West Shore Cafe in Homewood on Sept. 16 was serving house made herb crisp crackers topped with roasted eggplant and garlic puree that was provided by Mountain Bounty Produce. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Kari Koutnik of Christmas Valley was also a first-timer to Saturday’s event. She loves to cook and eat good food.

“This is a friendly event that isn’t intimidating,” she said.

Some of the lines at first seemed intimidating, but they moved fairly fast.

Most vendors had an ample serving of food and alcohol.

The Brewery at Tahoe created a watermelon, strawberry arugula salad with ingredients from Mama Earth Farms & Perez Farms that was worth visiting more than once. The Paramount Porter from Stateline Brewery was a fabulous pairing.

Chef Anthony Schiavone’s vegetarian rice concoction was being talked about by many patrons.

In the middle of the event was the annual chef’s showdown. This year it was structured like the Food Network’s “Chopped” show where chefs have to use a mystery box of food to come up with an appetizer, entrée and dessert in a certain amount of time, and with one chef being eliminated after each course.



Sample the Sierra is Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce’s annual event showcasing local chefs, regional food and area libation creators. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Starting the competition were Stephen Gill of Cherry Bomb Catering, Kristina Forsberg with Hard Rock Lake Tahoe, Anthony Schiavone of Bespoke Private Chef Services, and Patrick Harrity with Cold Water Brewery.

They were judged on cooking, plating and creativity. They had 30 minutes to create each dish.

In the appetizer round they had to use quail, pop rocks, cashews and sun dried tomatoes. It was Schiavone who was sent home first.

They had a pantry of sorts – though not to the extent of the TV show – to work with. Items ranged from butter to cilantro to corn to eggs to rice vinegar.

The entrée had to consist of pork chops, chickpeas, yellow curry and major grey chutney.

“The chutney is the hardest. I don’t know what to do with it,” Gill told *Lake Tahoe News*.

For Harrity, he was most worried about the chickpeas. He didn’t let that bother him too much, and instead wowed the judges with his smoked pork.

Forsberg wasn’t fazed at all by the ingredients in round two.

“I think they are all really good together. It makes sense,” she told *Lake Tahoe News*. “When I saw the box, I knew what I was going to do.”

It paid off. It was down to Forsberg and Harrity in the final dessert round.

They had to create something out of mascarpone, English peas, almonds and white chocolate.

Debbie Brown, who owns Cold Water Brewery, was a nervous wreck. After all, a chef of hers had won the competition twice

before. Harrity, who has been with the South Lake Tahoe establishment since January, was being put to the test. He was also performing in front of family members.

The pressure, while intense, didn't rattle him. His fritter over white chocolate and cranberry mascarpone with a sweet pea caramel put him over the top.

Asked by *LTN* if he would be making this at the restaurant anytime soon, he resoundingly said, "Absolutely not."



A capacity crowd meanders through Bijou Community Park at Sample the Sierra on Sept. 16. Photo/Kathryn Reed

The dessert round was the hardest for Harrity; saying the peas challenged him the most.

While Brown was a vision of nervousness as time went on, she is a staunch proponent of the competition, and said so long before the final decision was made. She encourages all restaurants to participate, saying it helps chefs grow and builds camaraderie among the staff.

For Harrity it meant practicing ahead of time – working on technique, memorizing what to do with ingredients. Ultimately, though, it was his creativity and ingenuity that paid off – peas et al.