

Creative cocktails benefit mental health programs



Original libations at Cocktails for a Cause on Oct. 4. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

A little bourbon might just have been the secret ingredient in what was a vodka themed cocktail contest.

Coldwater Brewery proved it's not just a beer joint. The South Lake Tahoe restaurant was the overall winner Wednesday night at the annual Cocktails for a Cause event. The bartenders also won the main cocktail contest and came in second for the mocktail – aka, the version without alcohol.

Now in its eighth year, the event is a fundraiser for the Barton Foundation. A certain cause within the South Shore-based health conglomerate is designated the beneficiary. This year it's mental and behavioral health services.

Mental health was a top concern in the 2012 and 2015 Community Health Needs Assessment. It's an area that Barton and other

agencies in the area have been putting resources toward, with the hope of helping people in need as well as bringing awareness to an issue that is often not openly talked about. Although mental illness – which ranges from mild depression to schizophrenia – has touched most people’s lives, it remains a more delicate subject than a physical ailment.

The cocktail contest dovetails into Barton Foundation’s big fundraiser in December – the **Festival of Trees and Lights**. The winning drink from the Oct. 4 event at Riva Grill will be served at the gala on Dec. 2.

The gang at Coldwater set out to make an adult Cherry Coke. The cherry cider mulled for a couple days to deepen the flavor profile. That’s where the bourbon came in. There is a distinct clove taste in the finished product. This is a perfect fall-winter spice that is used in so many entrees and desserts, that this drink could complement several dishes.



Winners:

Overall: Coldwater

Cocktails: 1. Coldwater 2. Riva 3. McP's

Mocktails: 1. Heavenly 2. Coldwater 3. Riva

Triple sec, sweet vermouth, and Coke rounded out the drink.

The main ingredient was Tahoe Blue Vodka – which every bartender had to use.

“There was plenty of trial and error,” bartender Aaron Stein told *Lake Tahoe News*. “The whole idea was to go back to a retro theme with Cherry Coke. Then we added seasonal flavors.”

For the judges, of which this reporter was one, the cocktail was served in a mason jar with a lid and candy cane looking straw.

There is talk this drink dubbed Hugs and Fizzes will be on Coldwater’s menu soon.

The other drink judges raved about was Apples to Apples created by Erick Martinez at Riva Grill. In addition to the vodka, it had ginger rosemary syrup, cold pressed apple juice, fresh muddled apples, lemon squeeze and fresh shaved cinnamon.

It wasn’t too sweet and the ginger definitely came through, several judges said. And with it being apple season, it, too, stood out as a distinctly seasonal beverage. The apple and rosemary garnish made a great impression as well.

Other contestants came from McP’s, Heavenly, Lucky Beaver, LewMarNel’s, and Glazed and Confused Tahoe Donut. Each made a cocktail and a mocktail, with different judges for each category.