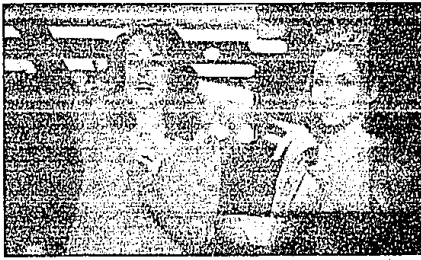


Hot stuff

Thirteen chilis stir up taste buds at annual Cook Off



Winning ticket: Calling out a raffle number are Audrie Chernauckas (left), a former Miss Farmington/Farmington Hills who started the Chili Cook Off in 1996 and Erin Cogswell, current title holder.

By TIM SMITH
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There was hot-enough-to-make-you-cry chili, chicken chili, creamy chili, even chili masquerading as meatballs in sauce.

In all, 13 different kinds of chili were fixed — and sampled — at the fourth annual Chili Cook Off at Pages Food and Spirits in Farmington.

Although some cried foul, results of the taste-testing were not fixed. Celebrity judges selected a basic meat-and-red bean concoction served up by Pages chef Doug Royse. It was the fourth straight year of the event that the host's chili won. But different judges were used each year, and samples are marked only with letters on the bottom of each plastic cup.

Proceeds from the fund-raiser will be divided between programs that serve the cities of Farmington and Farmington Hills: the Farmington Hills-based Youth and Family Services Program and Detroit Commons Seniors Activities Department.

"The first year (1996) we won with a black bean chili," Royse said. "The second and third years we won with a red bean

(chili) and again this year. Consistency is so important. It's your basic red bean and beef chili, the same one we'll sell here in the house."

Royse said his creation had some bite to it, "but not for a long period of time. I think it's important that individuals be able to taste the food without being punished later."

Actually, Royse did not win in a rout. Judges were deadlocked between his chili and one featuring white beans in a creamy base. In a second sampling, Royse won by a 4-2 vote.

Capturing the "People's Choice" award, selected by restaurant patrons who came out for the event, was Farmington Hills mayoral candidate Nancy Bates, now on the city council. Her chili, which had a decidedly Mexican flavor, featured kielbasa, chicken and picante sauce, among other ingredients.

"There are a bazillion recipes for chili and they're all good," said Bates, who noted that she was challenged to enter the contest by the city of Farmington.

Royse's opinion about why Pages keeps faring well at the cook-offs?

"I believe the two most important ingredients for chili is a good beef and a good bean,"

Royse continued. "I didn't have chicken in it, or white beans or meatballs."

Celebrity judges included U.S. Rep. Joe Knollenberg, R-Bloomfield Hills; Walter Sundquist, of Hoeny-Sundquist Funeral Home; Channel 50 news anchor Harry Hairston; Farmington Hills Fire Department Assistant Chief Bob Rebtay; certified Miss America judge Laura Hempton; and Tim Smith, a reporter for the Farmington Observer.

Greeting guests and emcee for the proceedings was current Miss Farmington/Oakland County Erin Cogswell, one of four candidates for the 1999 Miss Michigan crown.

Meanwhile, among those in attendance at the event were officials from both cities of Farmington and Farmington Hills and several contestants from the 1999 Miss Farmington/Oakland County and Miss Michigan pageants.

Taking part in the festivities were several contestants from Miss Farmington/Oakland County (organizers of the Chili Cook Off), Leslie Reinhold, Stephanie Watson and Yoko Minowa. Also participating was 1997 title holder Jennifer Hoemke.

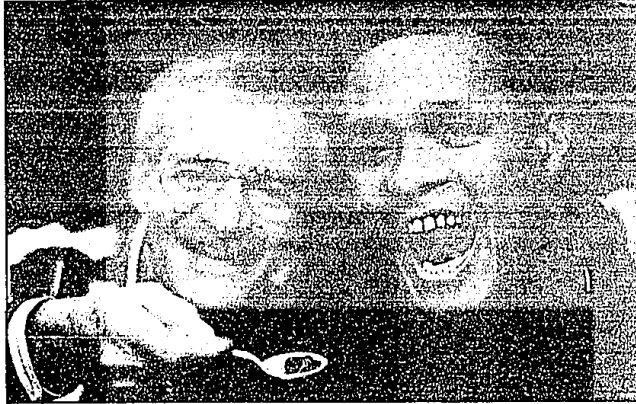
Representing the Miss Michigan pageant were: Miss Saginaw County Katie Cichowski; Miss Great Lakes Rebecca Becker; and Miss Redford Township Audrie Chernauckas, who actually formed the Chili Cook-Off in 1996, when she was Miss Farmington/Farmington Hills.

"This is a fun afternoon, a good way for families to get together," said Chernauckas, noting how well the event has grown over the past four years.

Chernauckas credited the Farmington-Farmington Hills communities for again coming out strong to back the event.

Concurring was Todd Lipa, supervisor of the Youth and Family Services Program.

"You take this weekend," Lipa said. "Saturday we raised over \$26,000 for Team Farmington (Special Olympics) at the Bowditch and then today ... That shows that the community really cares."



Harry likes it: Celebrity judges Bob Rebtay (left) of the Farmington Hills Fire Department and Harry Hairston, Channel 50 news anchor, get busy on the chili-tasting circuit.



Jubilant: Nancy Bates of the Farmington Hills City Council celebrates after her entry won the coveted "People's Choice Award."

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