

S.C. chili cook-off coming to Belton for second helping

By Charmaine Smith-Miles

Monday, April 11, 2011

BELTON — All sorts of chili recipes have been pitted against one another in the 45 years that the International Chili Society has been around — including one recipe that included prunes.

“People put all kinds of things in their chili,” said Vickie Marnick, administrator of the International Chili Society.

But Marnick added quickly that most chili recipes served up at International Chili Society events are created with the usual fare found in most chili: tomatoes, meat and chili powder. It’s all in the hands of the chefs who prepare the chili that make a certain recipe standout.

Such will be the case at the South Carolina Chili Cook-Off Championship, to be held in downtown Belton Saturday. There will be about 25 to 35 people competing in the professional chili competition and about 18 to 20 local chefs, from churches and community organizations, vying for the People’s Choice Award in the cook-off, the event’s co-chair, Jim Bright said.

Mike Freedman, from Connecticut, will be the chief judge for the event, Bright said. “The competitors really take this thing seriously,” he said.

The event is presented by MSW Security in downtown Belton, and is in its second year. It is the only chili cook-off in South Carolina sanctioned by the International Chili Society, Bright said.

In addition to the star dish, there will be other food served up as well. There will be competitions for salsa and chili verde — a chili usually made with pork and jalapenos. There will be more than 70 booths set up at the competition, many of them from various agencies and charities. Some of them will be selling other food such as baked goods and boiled peanuts, Bright said.

The event itself is free and open to the public and will feature live music as well as inflatable toys for children to play on, he said.

Those who win the professional chili, salsa and chili verde competitions will go on to compete in the chili society's world championship, where the grand prize is \$25,000. In Belton, the top winner will take home \$950 and a chance at competing for that \$25,000.

There will be three world championship winners at this year's state chili championship, Bright said. This year's world championship will be held in New Hampshire.

"These cooks travel because they want to go to the world championship," Bright said.

Competition certainly helps drive the chefs to the event, but every competition associated with the International Chili Cook-Off is also a fundraiser for local charities. In the society's 44 years of competitions, about \$89 million has been raised for various charities, Marnick said.

"It is a friendly rivalry for the cooks, but it also a great family," Marnick said. "And all of it is done to raise money for charities."

This is the second state chili cook-off competition to be held in Belton. In 2010, about 2,500 people attended and \$6,500 was raised, Bright said. He said that was divided among the Belton Interfaith Ministerial Association, the Belton Arts Center and the Belton Museum. This year, money will be divided up among the same organizations and all the drink sales will go to benefit the Boys Home of the South in Belton, Bright said.

"This started out as a really small idea. But we really felt like this would bring some outside interest in to Belton," Bright said. "Raising the money for these charities is the best thing we can do."

What: The South Carolina Chili Cook-Off Championship

When: 9 a.m. until 6 p.m. Saturday

Where: Downtown Belton

Who: Those who attend can bring a can of food and \$5 to purchase a wrist band which will allow them to sample chili, salsa and chili verde from each competitor — for the professional and the People's Choice competitions. The canned food donations will go to the Belton Interfaith Ministerial Association

For more information: Go to www.upstatechilicookoff.com or call the event's co-chair, Jim Bright at (864) 979-2658



© 2011 Scripps Newspaper Group — Online