



Perris News

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American Legion Post 595 Chili Cookoff Attracts Chili Chefs

From Canyon Lake and Canoga Park, Sun City and Costa Mesa, Quail Valley and Sandy Valley they arrived, each cook coming to Perris to make and advertise a special batch of chili.

The event was the 8th annual "International Chili Cook-off" at American Legion Post 595 in Perris. Each of the dozen entries vied for top honors, which guarantees a spot in the annual World Chili Cook-off later this year in Las Vegas.

Post 595 hosts the yearly event to raise money for the charities it supports, including Boy Scouts, Little League and high-school civics projects.

"This is a great event," said Perris City Councilwoman Joanne Evans, a former post commander who took part in organizing Saturday's event. "It's great for the post, for the community, for all the chili cooks and for all our visitors."

A country-western band provided musical entertainment. A classic car club brought several vintage vehicles. But for most people, it was all about the chili. Entries included PJ's Howling Dawg Chili, R.I.P. Chili, Phat Boy Chili, Jail House Chili and Mishap Chili.

"I took second place last year, and this year I'm aiming for first," said Marty Leitner, of Sandy Valley, Nev. Leitner and her husband, Richard, drove down from Nevada to Perris to take part. They call themselves Sundowner's Chili. They've been cooking chili competitively for more than 20 years. Their chili verde recipe: pork, green powders, cilantro and "a little potato for consistency," Marty Leitner said.

"It's really nice being with your chili friends," she said. "But of course you'd like to win. This is a smaller competition, so you have a better chance of winning."

Ellen and Bob Dyer of Canyon Lake—"Gearjammers Chili"—came dressed for the show. Ellen Dyer wore earrings in the shape of chili peppers. Bob Dyer came covered his dome with a cap that read: "Chili Head."

"That about explains everything," said Bob Dyer, the 2003 Chili Verde World Champion. "We like coming here to see all our friends."

Asked what the key ingredient to making good chili is, Ellen Dyer said: "salt." Too little, the recipe is bland. Too much, it's overpowering.

Darlene "Mishap Chili" Taylor Sun City, said weather, altitude and moisture also affect chili quality. So luck sometimes is as important as skill and experience.

"It's hit-and-miss," she said.

Taylor works as a microbiology technician. But chili is in her blood. She's been cooking competitively since 1987.

Her parents cooked before her.

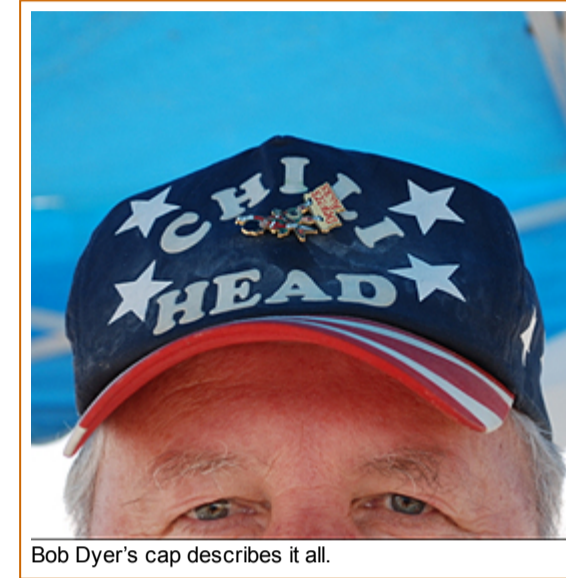
"Chili is part of my life," Taylor said.

Quail Valley resident Jim "Phat Boy" Jordan said his secret is a pork chop that he brown on the bottom of a pan and tosses it into the chili. That creates consistency. He also grinds his own cumin seed.

"All spices live and die," Jordan said. "Fresher lasts longer."

He admits that the prize money doesn't draw him to competitions like the one at the American Legion. It's all about recognition.

"You're always trying to perfect your recipe," he said. "You want to know that you're the best—at least for the day. There are former world champions here. You beat them, and when you go home at night, you smile."



Bob Dyer's cap describes it all.



Jim Jordan of Quail Valley ladles out a cup of his "Phat Boy" Chili.



Darlene Taylor of Sun City mixes a batch of "Mishap" chili.