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Meitus: Indoor Taste beats heat

July 27, 2005



Marty
Meitus

Walking on the wild side this year, the organizers of the 18th Denver Taste of the Nation, a program of Share Our Strength, decided to move the event to the Denver Convention Center from its former site, outdoors on the campus of Johnson & Wales University.

Given the heat, that turned out to be an unexpectedly good move. The chefs from the 40 or so restaurants seemed much calmer than in years past.

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That said, even the Coors Beer Garden and the 60-plus wineries couldn't change the sterile convention center atmosphere - giant blue bear outside notwithstanding.

The event, which raises money for the hungry and the homeless, is a massive effort of coordination, so the organizers tried to tie it together with a theme: Diners of Denver Unite!, with restaurants grouped together by neighborhood.

It was a good idea, but the execution could have used some work. I pictured a yellow brick road leading to the various destinations, with large street signs to tell you where you are.

What I got was a map and hard-to-read signs. I strolled around with chef/owner Paul Ferzacca of La Tour restaurant in Vail, and we missed a lot of the booths - even though we were looking for them.

So what's the dish of the day when you're trying to beat the heat? Ceviche, a cold dish of seafood marinated in lime juice. Ferzacca, who served a cold duck salad, marveled at the crowds lined up for cotton candy or a strawberry or banana to skewer in a chocolate fountain.

The real excitement was in the competition, where Lisa Givens of Westminster, who recently started a personal chef business, won the face-off against homemaker Heather Carroll of Colorado Springs for Top Home Chef in Denver.

The event raised somewhere between \$110,000 and \$115,000, according to organizer Gail Plemmons, which was on par with last year's event. Maybe next year they can do a picnic theme with that scary blue bear.

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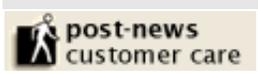


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