



Culinary Corner

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FEATURE



Photos courtesy of Charlotte Center City Partners

For Memphis in May-sanctioned barbecue competitions, the whole hog is cooked and then elaborately garnished for onsite judging.

part of the culinary experience, but this year it became a stand-alone event. The event, a sanctioned Memphis in May (MIM) cook-off, carries legitimate clout among seasoned barbecuers, so competition was fierce and stakes were high. The event drew the largest number of competitors in its four-year history, hosting 25 national and 48 local barbecue teams.

More than 72,000 enthusiasts attended the barbecue competition, which was held in Charlotte's historic South End.

Eat, sleep and live pork barbecue

For the uninitiated, MIM is the granddaddy of all barbecue competitions; it's the Super Bowl of Swine, the College of Pig Knowledge. MIM is without a doubt the largest pork barbecue-cooking contest in the world, with more than \$61,050 in cash prizes. The MIM competition is so big that contestants have to place in another regional contest to qualify for a space to compete at MIM.

"It's just like the Super Bowl," explained Diane Hampton, MIM executive vice president of marketing. "To be able to compete in our contest, first contestants have to win a playoff game." For MIM hopefuls, the "playoffs" are any number of sanctioned barbecue competitions held across the country throughout the year.

To qualify as an MIM-sanctioned event, Blues, Brews & BBQ this year had to follow the MIM rules regarding cooking practices as well as the use of certified judges and specific judging criteria. "It's a tight scoring system," Hampton said. "Even a tenth of a point could make a difference in who will win."

True to MIM format, the Blues, Brews & BBQ competition was judged both onsite (at the competitors' rigs or grills) and in a blind tasting. The scoring criteria included evaluation of the competitors' area and personal appearance; the presentation, appearance, tenderness and flavor of the entry; and the judges' overall impression.

Something to shout about

From cooking classes to culinary competition, Charlotte Shout had it all

by Heidi Billotto
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Two of Charlotte Shout's culinary festivals – the Culinary Arts Experience and Blues, Brews & BBQ – were grand-slam events, both entertaining record-breaking crowds.

Presented by Compass Group – The Americas, Johnson & Wales University – Charlotte Campus and Charlotte ArtsFest, the Culinary Arts Experience was the culmination of the monthlong Shout celebration. The event, held Sept. 29-30 in Gateway Village, featured a 3,000-square-foot stage with two working kitchens, seven live cameras and an enormous video screen, enabling visitors to view what chefs were cooking. Celebrity chefs were more than accessible to the crowd, posing for photos, signing cookbooks and conducting ongoing culinary demonstrations.

This year, 2,000 people attended the private Friday-night preview gala, where chefs, including Marcus Samuelsson from Aquavit in New York, Anthony Bourdain of The Travel Channel and Billy Strykowski representing Cooking Light magazine, delighted the crowd with their stories, tricks of the trade and expertise as they wielded knives and sizzling sauté pans in the two fully stocked kitchens.

Local chefs went head-to-head in Shout's signature cooking competition dubbed The Clash of the Titans,

with Chef Tom Condron of Mimosa, Upstream, Harper's, Arpa and Zink retaining his championship title against challenger JoAnna Nix of Nikko.

More than 35,000 people attended the free grand tasting event Sept. 30 from 10 a.m. until 11 p.m. Celebrity chefs Wolfgang Puck, Sara Moulton, Martin Yan, Ming Tsai, Scott Leibfried and Sara Foster were joined on the main stage by Robin Rosenberg of Levy Restaurants, Rick Browne of Barbecue America and Charlotte's Chris Ivens-Brown of the Compass Group in a series of culinary demonstrations. In additional Clash of the Titans competitions, Chef Tessia Berberian from Ember Grille defeated Chef Brigitte Shaw of Marguerite's French Bakery in the pastry and chocolate competition and Chef Jim Alexander from Zebra Restaurant outcooked Chef Mickael Blais from Cosmos Café in the grilling competition.

While culinary demonstrations were free, visitors bought tokens to purchase sample-size portions of food from 13 Charlotte restaurants and enjoyed samples of Barefoot wines and a variety of artisan Michelob beers.

No one sang the blues

In years past, the Blues, Brews & BBQ competition also has been a



The Gwaltney Championship BBQ Team celebrates victory with a first-place prize for pork shoulder at Charlotte Shout's Blues, Brews & BBQ.

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The whole hog

Barbecue is defined by the MIM World Championship Barbecue Cooking Contest as "pork meat prepared only on a wood and/or charcoal fire, basted or not, as the cook sees fit, with any substances and sauces as the cook believes necessary." There are three cooking categories in the competition: whole hog, pork shoulder and pork ribs.

Among the 115 judges, 86 were certified by MIM. The winners in the Charlotte competition in each category were as follows: In whole hog, first place went to Jack's Old South, second place to the Gwaltney Championship BBQ Team and third place to the Allnighters from Kings Mountain. In pork shoulder, top honors went to the Gwaltney team, second place to Ranucci's Big Butt BBQ and third place to the Allnighters. In ribs, the first-place

check and trophy went to Jack's Old South, with second and third place going to the Gwaltney team and Papa Pig & the Posse, respectively. The teams competed for a total purse of \$17,500.

The grand championship title went to Jack's Old South. Because Jack's Old South already has a berth in the 2007 MIM Championship Cook-off, the team that will represent Charlotte's Blues, Brews & BBQ 2006 in Memphis next May is the Allnighters.

Save the date

To attend the next Memphis in May World Championship Cooking Contest, slated for May 17-19, 2007, visit www.memphisinmay.org. Next year's Charlotte Shout culinary experience will take place Sept. 28-29. For details, visit www.charlotteshout.com/nav.cfm. □

CW 'cue contest

The staff at Charlotte Weekly appreciate good barbecue and have decided to host a friendly competition of our own. We will contact area barbecue joints and selected restaurants that feature barbecue to join in the competition. Our categories are chopped pork and beef barbecue. Competitors must be retail establishments selling barbecue to the general public on a regular basis. Entries will be judged on appearance, tenderness, flavor

and overall impression. In the spirit of the MIM guidelines, ours will be a blind tasting by a panel of Charlotte Weekly and Union County Weekly staffers.

This contest doesn't come close to being a sanctioned MIM event, nor do we offer a cash purse – only bragging rights to the winner as the Weekly's Top 'Cue 2006.

To enter our 2006 'Cue Contest, contact heidi@thecharlotteweekly.com by Sunday, Oct. 22.