



Contact:

Twin Rivertown Projects

For Immediate Release

Come Inside for the Spicy Hot Competition

2011 Lambertville- New Hope Winter Festival Chili Cook-Off is fiery hot for the 14th Time

Lambertville, N.J. – New Hope, PA., Jan 23, 2011

By: Sue Bell

On a cold Sunday in January 1992, the first Chili Cook-Off was born. It was held at the River Horse Brewery; it was and remains the final ticketed event of the Lambertville- New Hope Winter Festival. This new event was the concept of local Karen Lewis. She and a friend pulled out a card table and a cash box and sold tickets to everyone who came. It was an industrial space and it was cold. Came they did and every year since. Nostalgia has it, it was cold, the chili was hot, the beer was fresh and it was wall to wall people.

2011 will be the 14th Annual Chili Cook-Off. For the past four years, it has been held in heated space at with indoor plumbing at Occasions, Union Square, New Hope. This annual Winter Festival fund raising event is so much more than a fund raiser. It is a tradition for its loyal following. Groups of fans come together. Generations of families come. The local restaurants that enthusiastically participate now bring their families to cheer them on as well as enjoy the event.

River Horse Brewery has graciously sponsored this event not just with funds, but with hard work and equipment, and volunteers. For the past 15 years, under the tutelage of Mike Quinn, now former owner

of River Horse Brewery, best known by his 2011 Co Chair, Sue Bell, as the General Schwarzkopf of the cook-off, has masterminded this endeavor. He is the man who moves the mountains and gets the troops and equipment where it needs to be. It takes an army of volunteers at 7am on the last Sunday of January each year over three hours to set up alone. Our volunteers all show up with smiles and good shoes. This event is a massive endeavor with months of planning.

At 9:30am the restaurants begin to arrive and descend the staircase with all their equipment, and then the heating begins. No sooner do the restaurants begin to arrive, and then the fans begin arriving. This phenomenon is unusual, why? Since the second year, the chili cook off has presold their tickets and every year it sells out in advance, so why come early? It matters to the fans. They want to be first, they want to wait in the cold with the anticipation like Christmas morning of the special magic inside the unwrapped presents. Who will have the best chili this year? The lucky golden ticket holders take their role very seriously.

Once the doors are opened at 1pm, ticket holders are given a commemorative beer glass and three beer caps to cast their votes for their favorites. The competition is real. The restaurants bring their A games! They want to win! They want their customers there and they want the professional recognition from educated professionals. The competition is two prong: Judges Choice and People's Choice. The seven judges' blind taste and judge each restaurant's sample in several categories. This competition occurs prior to the door opening. It takes an hour and is graciously hosted by the original Chair of the Chili Cook-Off, Karen Lewis. For the past three years, her trusted assistant, Mary Ann Albee has joined her team. As soon as the judges are finished, the lobby is broken down and set up for the crowds, while Karen and Mary Ann tally the points. The Judges Choice has been selected prior to any ticket holder's arrival, however, these precious winners do not know until later.

Once the doors are opened at 1pm, the attendees patiently yet eagerly accept their mission with commemorative beer glass and three beer caps in hand, they seek the chili worthy of their votes. For the next two and half hours, the ticket holders, taste the chilies and have much conversation prior to casting their bottle cap ballots in the marked boxes underneath the much desired trophies.

Yes, trophies, three years ago at the suggestion of Jamie Hollander of Jamie Hollander Gourmet Foods, New Hope, trophies replaced the original prizes of chef jackets and hats of the first ten years of the competition. The trophies are new each year and are awarded to the first, second and third place winners in both categories. Last year, a new addition was added, the perpetual trophy which is inscribed with each winner from each year moving forward and displayed around the community at the winner's business establishment for the year. It is Lord Stanley of the Chili Cook-Off.

At three thirty the boxes are pulled and the counting begins. For the next fifteen minutes with over 1500 bottle caps to count, these secret counters under the supervision of Sue Bell, count and recount every competitor's box's content. This is the belly of the beast of inside of the cook-off. Local Folklore will state, the competition is rigged. It is not, nor is it possible. The anticipation of the results takes a feverish importance for everyone in the room.

At three forty five armed with the results in hand, the trophy presentation begins. It is very special and will be even more so this year.

For 2011, the Chili Cook-Off Co – Chairs, Mike Quinn and Sue Bell wanted to recognize everyone at the event in addition to the sponsors, the restaurants, the judges, and the volunteers, but new this year, the fans! Beginning at 11:30, there will be a pre- event at the cook-off for the crowd outside. There will be t- shirts and lanyards for sale, as well as entertainment for everyone’s enjoyment. The NJ Renaissance Faire will be in attendance entertaining those folks in line as well as at 12ish, with chain saw in hand, Fear No Ice, will begin a live ice carving of the one eyed pirate chef who will stand guard over this year’s cook-off. This original design which is the 2011 Chili Cook-Off logo is an original piece of art by Marco Grasso of Ship Bottom. Marco could be the biggest fan of the cook-off. Last year, he approached the organizers and said he wanted to do the logo. It is fierce!

This annual finale to the Lambertville New Hope Winter Festival will be bigger than ever due to the efforts of many as a tribute to the loyal fans of the chili cook-off from the Winter Festival Committee.

Complete event details, including the list of this year’s competitors as well as a list of all winter festival activities can be found at www.winterfestival.net