

Big, Bad and Tasty

Chili cook-off raises money for new Middletown playground

By Rebecca Layne

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Middletown — A new town park is closer to being renovated after a chili cook-off on Saturday brought in proceeds from hungry residents and supporters.

Middletown's first-ever chili cook-off, held in the town Fire and Rescue Company parking lot, helped raise \$2,750 for the renovation of the Middletown Park on Senseney Avenue, located behind the Fire Company building.

"Every child deserves a nice play area," said Tammy Mason, who has been leading fundraising efforts for the new playground.

The playground is "completely outdated," said Mason. "It's a safety hazard and completely play-at-your-own risk. It's really sad."

Mason hopes to put in new ground covering and a new play set equipped with four slides, a tunnel, and a bridge. She would also like to refurbish some existing playground equipment, including a rusty swing set. The new plan playground equipment and improvements would cost about \$50,000, according to Mason.

About 100 people showed up to taste-test the chili of the eight contestants and show their support for the new park.

The people's choice award and Grand Prize went to BB&T Bank of Middletown, which won with its Big, Bad and Tasty chili.

Jennifer Combs, a BB&T employee who did the cooking, said the recipe was her grandfather's.



Janet Keithley of Berryville serves up a sample from her offering in the competition. Her entry was dubbed Week Old Chili. *(Photo by Scott Mason)*

“There’s lots of love in that,” Combs said, pointing to her empty pot of chili. “We were the first ones to run out. Ran out in less than an hour.”

Some of her recipe secrets include putting the seasoning in the ground beef and adding the vegetables last so they stay crisp. She also put in artificial sugar to sweeten the pot.

“Most of the chili was either thick or watery,” said David Bailey of Middletown, who sampled all the entries. “Theirs (BB&T) was a perfect combination of meat, beans, and whatever else they put in there.”

This is the first time Combs has submitted her chili into a contest. Next year, the only thing Combs said she will do differently is make more.



Eleven-year-olds Alex Vosika (left) and Forrest Limon try some of the chili that was offered at the cook-off at the Middletown Volunteer Fire Department on Saturday.

(Photo by Scott Mason)

Department Store in Winchester and DuPont of Front Royal.

Charlie Higgs of Middletown won first place from the panel of judges with his Blazin Buzzard Stew. Second place went to town resident Ray Steele’s Smokin Ray’s Chili. Third place went to Winchester’s Phill Parsons’ Homestyle Chili.

The five judges were WINC-FM’s Barry Lee, Mayor Mark Brown, Police Chief Philip Breedon, Fire Chief Henry Shiley, and Warner Crocker, artistic director of the Wayside Theatre.

The event was sponsored by Grace United Methodist Men and its president, Thomas Bailey.

Other large supporters included Kohl’s

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