



The Unitor

Exchange Club
of Tuscaloosa

Weekly Newsletter of the Exchange Club of Tuscaloosa
Chartered February 9, 1923 • Affiliated with the National Exchange Club

www.tuscaloosaexchangeclub.org

December 26, 2013

In service to the community, state, and nation, for exchange of ideas among business and professional men and women...

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The Unitor

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Meetings will resume on January 9 with a report on legislative issues by State Representative Bill Poole. Amy Echols from Kentuck will join us on the 16th. The 23rd, Vicki Kerr from Caring Days will speak. Chip Cooper will tell us about his Cuba experience on the 30th. Bring a guest in January! *-Laura*

Chili Fundraiser Draws a Crowd

"In a cross between Halloween, Mardi Gras and a neighborhood yard party teeming with competitive chefs," reported Staff Writer **Mark Hughes Cobb** in the *Tuscaloosa News* last year, "the Exchange Club of Tuscaloosa served up steak, chicken, sausage, venison, peppers, cheese, beans and more beans for its 2013 Great Tuscaloosa Chili Cook-Off Saturday at the Bryant Conference Center."

He went on to say: "The coveted gaudy trophies for booth, costume and showmanship inspired the visual elements, a crucial component to the steaming mixes of sauces and spices. Offering up samples were a full booth of Wizard of Oz characters (including more Dorothy's than usual), saloon ladies from Miss Kitty's (handing out Bunsmeke Chili) and contingents of Duck Dynasty faces so wondrously hirsute it'd be hard to tell the players from grizzly bears without a scorecard.

All the leftover wit that didn't go into costuming and crafting recipes went into the naming of teams: Chili Chili Bang Bang (West Alabama Food Bank), Armadilly Chili (Tanner Guin & Crowell), the Combat Chili Challenge (helping you work off a few calories with help from a Tuscaloosa Fire and Rescue sledgehammer), Blazing Saddles (Alabama AG Credit) and Hot Pursuit (the Tuscaloosa County Sheriff's Department, offering one up for "Smokey and the Bandit" fans).

"Thirty-nine teams competed for awards given by judges, including the hotly contested Grand Champion Chili awards, and also the Best Booth (for design, theme and construction), Best Costume (best fits to a team's theme) and Showmanship (for overall presentation and performance).

"Every one of them is local," said Curtis Baggett, an Exchange Club member who helped organize the event. "And they get very competitive for this event." Vying for the crowd's attention seemed to be the modus operandi for bringing home the People's Choice Chili awards, earned by popular vote of the roughly 1,000 people who came to sample and enjoy."



Cookoff Committee Members:

Glen Smith - Chairman
Bev Leigh, III - Chair Emeritus; Sponsors
Curtis Baggett - Cook Teams
Candice Burge - Food Service, Finance
James Cochrane
Martha Cook - Publicity
Robert Cotton - Chairman Emeritus
Evans Fitts - Judges
Phyllis Gamble - Communications
Nan Glaus - Schedules
Bill Goodwin - Food Service
Laura Gregory - President - elect
Ardis Hancock - Finance
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Russell Phifer - Graphics
Nicholas Porter
Finis Prendergast
David Reynolds - Entertainment
Sontonia Stephens
Bill Tate - Photography
Lisa Underwood - Judges
Jim Zeanah - President

YOU KNOW YOU DON'T WANT TO MISS IT THIS YEAR!

**Mark Hughes Cobb on 2013's
Great Chili Cookoff** *(from page 1)*

"We live for this. We love it," said Katherine Daniels, one of the "shady ladies" of Miss Kitty's Bunsmoke Chili, representative from Capstone Bank, with multiple trophies on display. Decked out in wild west saloon garb, Daniels and Phyllis Gamble slapped stickers and slid souvenir garters onto visitors, urging them toward chef Meredith Gardino's chili.

First-time contestants Robertson Bank entered boldly as Championship Chili, but with a bit of a ringer in four-time chef Billy Wharton, husband of Robertson employee Becky Wharton. He'd cooked for the contest before with Tuscaloosa Fire & Rescue.

"We're champions because his (chili) is the best," she said. But the group hedged bets by dressing out in Crimson Tide gear.

Rod Halsten, chef for Chili Today Hot Tamale, similarly noted he'd had to alter his chili for a wide-ranging crowd. His aim was for a sweetness to hit the palate first, then have the peppers come roaring in behind that. "Personally, I like it hot, where after two bites sweat starts coming out on your forehead," he said, laughing. "But I tune it down for this."

The family friendly event featured ice cream and biscuits, too, along with all the crackers, cheese and other samples various contestants offered. There was a children's area, with face-painting and balloons. From the stage, the Robert Morgan Band and Angela Hamiter and the Able Brothers provided acoustic music to dine by, broken up by prize announcements and other notes from Glen Smith, cook-off chair.

"This is our biggest fund-raiser," Smith said, The Chili Cook-Off raises \$20,000 annually for local nonprofits who fall under the Exchange Club's four chief areas: Youth, Community Service, Child Abuse Prevention and Americanism. Money raised also goes into the Exchange Club Foundation, which gives grants to area organizations such as Arts 'n Autism, Boys and Girls Clubs, Focus, United Cerebral Palsy, the Good Samaritan Clinic and dozens of others.

Exchange Club of Tuscaloosa
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Message from the Chairman

The Exchange Club's 8th Annual Chili Cookoff is set for Saturday, February 8, 2014 at the Bryant Conference Center. In each of the last 2 years, we've raised \$20,000, and our combined net gain over 7 years has exceeded \$100,000. We use the proceeds to fund our work in the Tuscaloosa region for Child Abuse Prevention, Community Service, Youth Development, and Honoring America.

In addition, \$6000 of Cookoff money from the 2012 event was given to the Exchange Club Foundation which provides grants to local charities and non-profits. And \$5,000 in 2013 Cookoff money was given to the local Police Athletic League. Several years ago, Cookoff money paid for the fence at the Miracle League Park, which cost \$10,000.

Recently the Club made a donation for Cookoff funds to help pay for a van to transport military veterans. We feel we are good stewards of the money generated and get the most bang for the buck in terms of caring for our fellow citizens with genuine needs.

The Chili Cookoff has become a popular annual event in Tuscaloosa which features 40 teams competing for Best Chili, Best Costumes, Best Booth, and Peoples' Choice Chili. The winners are awarded handsome trophies and cash prizes. Team members receive a commemorative, customized T-shirt or apron and team photos. Cookoff attendees sample the varieties of chili as well as enjoy inexpensive beverages, free ice cream, free cheese biscuits, live music, and children's activities.

Guests have chances for valuable prizes - a large HDTV, tires, Saban-autographed Bama gear, Alabama Football and Basketball Tickets, Alabama jewelry, and restaurant gift cards, etc. A continuous video runs on the big screen paying tribute to our sponsors. Recent Chili Grand Champions have included NUCOR, First Federal Bank, Jamison Money Farmer, and Rosen Harwood.

I will be the Chairman of the 2014 Chili Cookoff for the 4th consecutive year. I'm originally from Mobile; my wife, Rhoda, is from Birmingham. We moved to Tuscaloosa in 1991, after I retired from the US Army Dental Corps. It's impossible for us to believe there is a better place to live than T-Town; we appreciate the privilege of participating in community activities, such as the Chili Cookoff; and we are impressed with the service projects that the Exchange Club and other service clubs and businesses support.

Many thanks to the devoted members of the Chili Cookoff Committee, our loyal sponsors, cookoff teams, and Exchange Club volunteers. We couldn't do it without you.

-Glen Smith

