It’s chow(der) time

By CALVIN WELCH

SANTA CRUZ — The scent of thyme, bacon, clams and other ingredients wafted through the air of the Boardwalk on Saturday at the 33rd annual Santa Cruz Clam Chowder Cook-Off.

The competition had 66 individual clam chowder entries, with the common Boston style — creamy and white — and the Manhattan style — red and with- out any dairy.

Dave Arron, a 24-year-old culinary student at Cal Poly, was there to help out at one of the college’s two booths.

“I have to add ling to it and we’re trying to add some heronchad at the end,” she said. “That’s how we do it in my house anyway.”

The college brought seven people, mostly students, to the competition. While the students are in various parts of their careers, the college is placed in the professional category because many of the students work at the college’s restaurant.

It makes sense since they have a slight edge because of their training, Arron said.

An estimated 30,000 people were expected for the competition.

ON THE NET
To see videos from the clam chowder cook-off, visit santacruzsentinel.com and click on this story.

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tion, said Karley Pope, director of promotions and entertainment at the Boardwalk.

“We’ve gone through snow and rain on this day and it still brings out a crowd,” she said. “But this time we have the beautiful sun so we’re expecting a good turnout.”

Proceeds go to the Santa Cruz Deltas and Recreation Department programs. Pope said officials are hoping to raise $80,000, the amount raised in 2018.

Competitors arrive in the morning and begin ingredient preparation. But stores can’t sell it till 3 p.m. Then it’s two hours of intense cooking followed by hours of pitching their chowders to panel judges, trying to garner votes for the best chowder.

Wes Clima, a 27-year-old from Santa Cruz, was perusing the booths and was more than excited to be there.

“I’m a seafood nut,” Clima said. “We’re here.”

Clima was clutching several tasting bags filled with plastic cups for sampling the chowders. But he politely said that they weren’t all for him. Clima was with family and they were enjoying the Boardwalk in between the cooking and the sampling.

With more than 60 chowders available, Clima wasn’t sure how he was going to pick which ones to sample.

“Whichever one smells best when I walk by,” he said.

Gigi Davis attended representing Louie’s Griddle in the Middle, a Monterey restaurant. The team’s secret? Love, Davis said.

“Sometimes right before we compete, we all sit the pot,” Davis said. “We really believe that if we use the freshest ingredients and most care and most love in our heart, we’ll be the best.”

Matt Maltesia competed for the sixth year. The secret to his chowder? “Spontaneous whole baby clams.”

“You get a nice bite of clam in it,” he said.

The clams were prepared beforehand and he said it took 30 people six hours to shuck the clams.

Though he said the atmosphere and meeting the people are a great part of the competition, the team was there for glory.

“We like to win this,” he said with a smile.

Nabasha Hesson, a native of Ireland who lives in Mountain View, was there to meet a friend.

While this was her first chowder contest, the 30-year-old said she’s attended oyster and clam festivals in Ireland.

Hesson said she doesn’t eat meat and looked for a chowder that didn’t use bacon. But she isn’t likely to try away from chowders with clams.

“Oh, yeah, loads of clams,” she said with a laugh. “No diet today.”

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An estimated 3,000 people were expected for the competition.

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