Hot and sweet combine for mouthful of fun at salsa contest

By Kathryn Reed

TWIN BRIDGES – Take small bites. That was the advice of Dennis, veteran Sierra-at-Tahoe salsa judge. Still, my tongue was numb for a bit of the contest.

With 19 concoctions to taste, it was a good thing several criteria are involved to come up with a possible total score of 50. However, flavor-taste is the biggie – with a possible 20 points. Overall impression is the next biggest point factor with 10 being the most that can be awarded. Up to five points were give for color-appearance, aroma, originality, and spice blend.

It reminded me a bit of wine tasting – just no spitting. Instead of swirl, smell, sip, spit, it was look, smell, taste, swallow.

Lake Tahoe News Publisher Kathryn

Reed tries to decide if she likes this salsa. Photo/Susan Wood

Looking at the various salsas lined up in front of me it seemed a bit daunting. What if I wanted to spit? All those people watching and the maker in the crowd – better just smile.

But this was serious business. The stakes were high. The winner of the traditional and fruit categories would go home with a 2012-13 season pass to Sierra.

There are some wonderful salsa makers out there. My favorite for the traditional was called The World's Best. I wasn't alone. It was awarded the best in that class.

Shane Hammett, the maker of The World's Best, won two years ago, too.

"Like it lots, including the kick. Woo-hoo," is what I wrote during the Sunday afternoon contest.

For the fruity segment, my favorite was the Kiwi Kicker Mango Madness created by Dave Young. It had fruit and heat mixed together for a fantastic blend of flavors. The winning salsa was West Bowl Special by Leah Rademacher. However, because Rademacher wasn't there to claim her prize, the season pass went to Young.

Other judges, for the April 15 event were Dennis – lift operations manager at Sierra, Hugh – ski patrol, Jeff – security, and Lauren – marketing.

Tips for next year's salsa makers – the pureed ones don't do well on presentation, so that could be a loss of five points from the start. Most of the fruit is mango, so perhaps a different fruit should be used – watermelon if you could find

one this time of year, and pineapple are ideas. The Ish scored high especially with Hugh and me when it came to aroma. That smokiness was definitely intriguing and unique. Only a couple tomatillo salsas were entered, so that is a choice that could be exploited a bit. Too much salt in a couple salsas had them receiving low scores for taste.

But these are just one judge’s comments. I’m thinking I might take this insider info and enter the contest next year.

While Sierra’s West Bowl is now closed, the other side of the mountain is open through next weekend. Too bad West Bowl won’t be open this week – the skiing there on Sunday was as good as the salsa.

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