

Large crowd savours the offerings at annual celebration of food and drink

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Arturo Estrella prepared food at the Southeast Newcomer Services booth during Savour the Southeast.

People in the Estevan area continue to love Savour the Southeast.

The event attracted 1,500 to 1,600 people, which included exhibitors, and another 133 volunteers. There were 33 alcohol vendors and 20 more selling food.

“It was an absolute success,” said Josh LeBlanc, who was one of the organizers of the event. “It was an amazing time had by all. We’ve had great comments coming back to us. Vendors were happy. Sponsors were happy. Bands were blown away by the number of people that were out to see them, and how they were treated by the community.”

There was excellent variety offered by the exhibitors as well. In the past, LeBlanc said Savour hasn’t had the representation for spirits that it wanted, but that changed this year, thanks in part to the arrival of some distilleries in the province.

A new feature this year was the Chef’s Challenge, with David Vinoya from the Double Tree by Hilton in Regina, Jennifer Schrenk from Chef Jenni Catering in Saskatoon, and Ryan Katchuk from Casino Regina participating. Vinoya was the winner.

“We thought it would be cool to elevate the culinary experience, and see what that was like, so we brought those three chefs in,” said LeBlanc. “The majority of them have been gold medal plates contenders, so they’re no strangers to competitions. I think they handled themselves very well. We heard great things about that as well.”

LeBlanc would like to see local chefs involved with the challenge in future years.

Entertainment was courtesy of Justin LaBrash, League of Wolves and Fogdog. LeBlanc said they received excellent feedback about all three performers.

“One thing that’s kind of cool is that any country artists that we bring in, somehow they seem to win some type of Saskatchewan Country Music Award right before the show,” said LeBlanc. “We like to think of ourselves as kind of the horseshoe for those guys. Justin LaBrash won the Saskatchewan Country Music Award for emerging artist a couple of weeks ago.”

LeBlanc said Savour the Southeast has already built up an impressive reputation among the vendors, even though it started in 2016.

“We’re one of the better shows in the province,” he said. “They really do appreciate how we treat them.”

Exhibitors have to pay their staff to be at the show, and they have to pay for product, hotel rooms and travel as well. It means organizers have to work hard on the business side to appeal to the vendors.

The board members and staff of Envision dedicated a lot of hours, and volunteered throughout the evening as part of their commitment to being a beneficiary of Savour the Southeast.

“In consultation and feedback, we’ve developed a business model for the show on the vendor attraction side that allows us to get the high quality of vendors that we do,” said LeBlanc.

For the second straight year, all of the booths were spread out across the floor of Affinity Place. The entertainment stage was at the south end of the arena floor, and there was also a sound booth at the north end.

Some people had concerns about congestion, but LeBlanc said the crowds have flowed much better the last two years than in the first edition of the event.

He cautions the public that these events always generate large crowds.

“We’ve tried to create a flow and a large viewing area for people to have the space that they need if it’s too crowded,” said LeBlanc.

There have been suggestions in the past to have vendors in the upstairs concourse of Affinity Place, but LeBlanc said organizers have to be fair to the exhibitors, and most of the traffic is on the arena floor. Vendor feedback has indicated a desire to have everyone remain on the floor.

“We try to be as equitable as we can, and we try to treat the vendors as well as we can,” said LeBlanc.

Proceeds from Savour the Southeast will be directed to the Envision Counselling and Support Centre. LeBlanc said they don’t have a tally for how much money was raised, but he expects it will be similar to the \$43,000 that was collected last year for the new outdoor facility at the Kin Hillside Play Park.

“When we were going through the selection process, since the show is called Savour the Southeast, we wanted to choose or pick a group that had an impact or an influence on the southeast portion of the province. Envision really pulled through for us this year.”