

# Get a taste of Champaign

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Under a sometimes overcast sky more reminiscent of January than of June, people from all walks of life packed into West Side Park on Friday, Saturday and Sunday for the 37th annual Taste of Champaign-Urbana. However, much more was going on than the simple selling of food. Musicians pumped music into the air, artisans displayed their work in booths scattered around the park and kids were treated to pony rides and a petting zoo. In all, the roads were packed with families and couples out to eat, have a good time and support a good cause.

## For a good cause

The Taste of Champaign-Urbana was developed 37 years ago to support the Champaign Park District's Youth Scholarship Fund.

"The fund provides opportunities for area youth who are not financially able to participate in our programs," said Laura Auteberry, the event's marketing manager. "We're proud of it in that way."

With more than 100 booths this year, it has grown since the original incarnation. Last year alone, more than 50,000 people attended the Taste, raising \$23,000 for the fund. And despite the rainout on Saturday evening, organizers are hopeful that they will break last year's mark both in terms of fundraising and participation.

Organization and hard work are key to keep the show running. While it takes months to plan, setup began early last week. Tents went up on Tuesday as well as the electrical generators and wires.

Early on Friday morning, hours before the 5 p.m. opening, park district staff arrived to organize the vendors and get everything ready for the public.

"I've been here early every day," said Auteberry. "It takes a lot of people, well over 100 people to run everything."

A majority of that workforce is volunteer. Many families and friends of park staff volunteer, especially the children of park district families, said Auteberry.

In addition to the fund, other organizations were selling food to support philanthropic projects. Champaign County Historical Museum was selling lemon shake-ups and popcorn, and Champaign Central High School was working to send its band to New York City for the Veteran's Day Parade.

## New beginnings

As Damon MacNaught sat in a foldout chair, in front of him lay a table full of glass artwork. Vases, Christmas tree ornaments and candlesticks of various shapes and colors were carefully placed because of their brittle nature.

"All of (these pieces) is just me fooling around," he said. "I usually do more sculptural works. Each one, however, is a renewed challenge."

In addition to the food, for which the Taste of C-U is known, artisans come from all over to display their work and drum up business. MacNaught was mainly using the event to help jump-start his new business.

"I just moved to Tennessee and I'm starting up a studio there. I expect my utilities to be around \$2500 a month, so I know I need to do these sorts of events."

For MacNaught, sculpting has been a journey that has lasted almost 15 years. After receiving his bachelor's degree in sculpture from Hartwick College in Oneonta, NY, he moved to Tennessee, working as a resident in the Appalachian Center for Craft. From there, he transferred to the University, getting his master's degree in sculpture in 2005, and then worked as a visiting instructor for two years.

"Working with glass is like a team sport. People give input, they help out and give advice. In the end, you come out with something unique," MacNaught said.

In addition to the input, something else is infused with the sand to make glass.

"All of my pieces come from love of form and decorative objects," he said.

Karen Mikle, the owner of Karen's Cheesecake Confections in Rantoul, was also using the Taste to help her business along. Although she has been working with cheesecakes for some time, it was only in September that she decided to create the business, which runs out of Diablo's Restaurant in Rantoul. Her loves of candy and cheesecake were the two things Mikle cited first as inspiration.

"Eli's and Cheesecake Factory make the big cakes, and so I'm doing small cakes. I'm basically trying to fill out the niche for little cakes," she said.

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