

Barbecue, music highlight Seneca Fest

BY GREG OLIVER
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — The annual Seneca Fest — offering culinary delights and a variety of live music — drew thousands over the weekend to Norton-Thompson Park.

For some, the aroma of barbecue served by award-winning vendors throughout the state was enough to entice one's palate. For others, musical entertainment highlighted by the legendary Little River Band, of the late '70's-early '80's, made the visit worthwhile.

Twenty-three barbecue teams competed Saturday for cash prizes during the Education Foundation of Oconee County Cook-Off. Morrey Thomas, marshal and master judge for the South Carolina Barbecue Association, said judging, in this case Boston Butt pork shoulders, is based on the following categories: aroma, appearance, texture/tenderness, taste and overall impression, with numeric scores assigned. Although maximum scores range from 3 in appearance to 5 for tenderness and texture and taste, decimal points were allowed.

A score of 17 marked the maximum a team could receive.



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Brian Teague, who finished second in the South Carolina Barbecue Association's point standings and won the barbecue competition at Seneca Fest in 2011, said preparing barbecue that suits "middle of the road" tastes is the key. Teague and his wife, Sherry (also pictured) are from Rock Hill.

Those participating as certified judges earn their stripes. Thomas said judges are initially brought in as novices, in which they provide scores that do not count toward the competition, and work their way up the ranks. Under the tutelage of a master judge, the novice judge can become a certified judge after four events and their scores count from that point forward.

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The True Blues band performs Saturday afternoon at Seneca Fest.



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Rob Bonifay, left, and Mike Bolden, both of Charleston, winner's of the People's Choice award, are pictured with their cooker named "Jack Leg."

TOPS IN BARBECUE

The results of the 2012 Education Foundation of Oconee County Barbecue Cook-off, held at Seneca Fest:

First place — Smokin' Stacks, Jeff Smith; Trophy and \$2,000.00

Second place — Bite Me BBQ, Garry Emory; Trophy and \$500

Third place — Can't Quit Smokin', George Kine; Trophy and \$500

People's Choice — Jack Leg BBQ, Rob Bonifay
23 cookers took part, with scores ranging from 15.8167 (first) to 14.1783 (last):

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"We always encourage our judges to take their time since the barbecue entrants took their time to prepare it," Thomas said.

Bill Walsh, of Easley, has been a judge for three years and a lover of barbecue for 64 overall.

"I get to go to parts of the state I would never get to go or have a reason to go otherwise, including Chesnee, Jackson, on the edge of the bomb plant (also known as the Savannah River Site), south of Aiken; Lake City and other places," Walsh said. "I enjoy coming up early on Saturday morning, eating barbecue, meeting judges and seeing festivals. Each community is a little unique."

Walsh, who trained novice judges at Saturday's event, said judging involves setting aside personal preferences and never growing tired of eating barbecue.

"We all bring plastic bags with us and divide up the extras to take home," he said.

Similar to NASCAR, teams competing for cash prizes in the South Carolina Barbecue Association enter up to 35 events during the season and points earned for the top 10 teams are cumulative. At the end of the season, there will be an overall winner based on the total number of points.

"The difference in first to 10th place can be half a point," Thomas said.

If people weren't eating barbecue this

weekend, many brought lawn chairs or found a spot in the grass to enjoy the plethora of musical entertainment featured on the main stage.

On Friday evening, Soul Feathers and Part Time Party Time Band were the featured musical groups while Saturday saw Sound Check, True Blue and Stone Echo preceded the Little River Band. The Little River Band, formed in 1975 out of Melbourne, Australia, has sold more than 25 million records and achieved 13 American Top 40 hits.

This year marked the third consecutive that Richard and Deborah Hudson, of Westminster, attended the Seneca Fest concerts.

"I'm an old rocker and still love music," Richard Hudson said. "I love the beat, the lyrics and it really affects your life. A lot of these songs are your life and we all have someone we get hold of."

Sallie Kudra, of Seneca, a first time attendee, agreed that it was the music that brought her to Seneca Fest.

"It was the free music — good, free music," Kudra said.

Todd Scott, of Clemson, also marking his first time attending the event, said it was the entire experience he found appealing.

"Seeing the people come in, enjoying the sights, the food, the events and stuff," Scott said. "Everything is enjoyable."

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