

Chili for charity: Central Texans flaunt culinary flair for scholarships  
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LORI STEINDORF  
Features Editor

It's still a few weeks away, but for the love of chili, make plans now to participate in or attend the Fourth Annual San Marcos Winter Chili Cookoff.

Teams from across Central Texas will turn up the heat on their flavorful creations and promote a little friendly competition during the Fourth Annual San Marcos Winter Chili Cookoff scheduled for Feb. 6 at the VFW Post 3413 located at 1701 Hunter Road.

The cookoff is organized by the Texas Tolbert Chili Group with proceeds going this year to the VFW Post 3413's scholarship fund that financially assists a number of students each year in furthering their educations after high school.

"In 2015, we were able to give 14 \$500 scholarships to students from various high schools around Texas. The scholarship fund varies from year to year based on the attendance of the cookoffs. The scholarship fund was started as a memorial to Mike BB Hughes, a founding member and cook for many years. He passed away in the fall of 2010 and the scholarship was started as a memorial to him," said Justin Gillette of the Texas Tolbert Chili Group. Gillette typically participates in 15 to 20 cookoffs a year to support community charities. He is proud of his participation and enjoys the camaraderie along with helping others in need and the opportunity to visit new places.

"There are a lot of people who belong to the Central Texas Chili Group. We are basically a well organized, loosely based group of friends whom love to raise money for charity and cook chili," Gillette said.

He said the year-round cookoffs marry the two things members of the Texas Tolbert Chili Group love most: cooking chili and charity.

"There are many charities that are supported through the cooking of the chili. For example, recently in Port O'Connor, we helped establish funds to help the local volunteer fire department with some new equipment. We have also done cookoffs to help with juvenile diabetes awareness and research funds. There are a few cookoffs that benefit local food banks in the area by bringing in canned goods and money to support the food bank. We do a lot of work with the VFW lodges and the Ladies Auxiliary. There are a few scholarships that are awarded through the group as well as given to the VFW to send students to college. We also contribute to ALS research to one day help find a cure. The Hill Country Mission for Health was another good charity that we support and believe in. They have a mobile clinic that helps no and low-income people afford health care," Gillette said.

Gillette underscores why it is important for communities to support chili cookoffs.

“As a chili cook, I have seen firsthand the impact it has on the community. I have seen the smiles it puts on people’s faces to receive that extra dollar, that extra helping hand to send that kid to college or buy equipment to help save lives and fight fires, to help the people that need medical attention that otherwise would not receive it. I feel there is a strong need to help and support these charities. It feels just plain good that we are helping and giving back to the community,” he said.

Participants can prepare one chili for \$15 or both for \$20. There is an open beverage category with a \$5 fee, a green chili category at noon for \$5, jackpot beans category at 1 p.m. for \$10 and red chili at 2 p.m. for \$10 with the junior chili category at 2:30 p.m. for \$5 and open cast iron category at 3 p.m. at \$10.

There will be a registration table set up where participants can register on the spot to cook. “You will be given a judging cup with a raffle ticket taped to it. One half of the raffle ticket stays with the cup, and the other half gets taken off and initialed and saved. All cooks must have a fire extinguisher on hand. Chili must be cooked on site the day of the cookoff. We typically use portable camp stoves to cook the chili. Chili is cooked with no beans,” Gillette said.

He said either a trophy or certificate is awarded to those in first through 10th place. At the world championship for the Central Texas Tolbert Chili Cookoff in Terlingua, the winner earns a large chunk of limestone with an inscription on it, which is currently held by three-time world champion Dave Lazarus.

The Ladies State winner receives a crown. Heather Burdick is 2016’s reigning queen. Tolbert Texas Men’s State Champion is Mick Joplin. Mike Behr is the 2015 Tolbert Texas State Winner.

For information, visit [www.centraltexaschili.com](http://www.centraltexaschili.com)