

## **Fantasy Fun Raises Money for Club**

By JOY JUEDES, Staff Writer

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REDLANDS - It hit home for Andrew Hartzell when he met the kids.

"I had been on the board for awhile and I had this concept of helping kids," said Hartzell, president of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Redlands board.

"But I got to have personal conversations with them, learn about what they liked about the club, what their home life was like," he said.

Hartzell, other Boys & Girls Clubs staff and members of the community filled the Mitten Building Saturday evening for Chocolate Fantasy, the clubs' major annual fundraiser.

CEO P.T. McEwen said more tickets and sponsorship tables were sold this year.

"People love coming here and they know what it's for," he said.

Chocolate Fantasy was also the first large event that used the venue's added space. The building to the south was originally the shipping facility in the 1940s and was recently acquired from Thatcher Engineering, according to Margie Armantrout, who works at the Mitten Building.

Some restaurants and caterers participated in Chocolate Fantasy from the beginning, some, like Rocky Mountain Chocolate Factory, were rookies.

"It's definitely something we'd do again," said Stephanie Torres, who owns Rocky Mountain on Lugonia Avenue with her husband Felix.

She said their store does a lot of dipping and caters to children.

"We wanted to find the right fit for the event," she said. She brought dipped fortune cookies, fudge, rock candy, dipped cherries and small cups of "tiger butter."

Upstairs, perennial heavyweight Michelle's Bakery served chocolate bombes - chocolate cake and chocolate buttercream covered with dark chocolate - raspberry

truffles covered in white chocolate and chocolate dacquoise - chocolate and meringue covered in almonds.

"I raised three boys who used the Boys & Girls Club," said Michelle Braswell, the bakery's namesake. "And it's always nice to help the community."

Most of the vendors served appetizers or small servings of meat or pasta. The Orchard by Partners Pantry mixed it up, offering cocoa orange chicken, asparagus with white chocolate Alfredo sauce, pecan balls with barbecued apricot and chocolate mousse with an orange-favored cookie.

"When I was growing up in western Pennsylvania I was a member of the Boys' Club," said co-owner Roger Cunningham. "I could go there for an entire day, swim, play racquetball - it was an incredible experience."

At the table next door, Mill Creek Cattle Co. stuck to their staples, pulled pork sandwiches and beef brisket - and ran out early, as usual.

"I brought extra this year, and still," said manager Melissa Donovan.

"We love coming together, say 'How are you doing?', share recipes," she said.

At the next table, Farm Artisan Foods' special events coordinator Stephanie Luczynski served appetizers and caramel truffles. It was her first time at Chocolate Fantasy.

"All the board members have come around and made us feel welcome," she said.

New Boys & Girls Clubs board member Jack Kohlmeier also attended his first Chocolate Fantasy.

"Part of the idea is not just to raise funds for the club but make it a fun event for businesses and the community," he said.

But the fundraising is critically important to the club, especially with school funding down and the economy, he said.

"If it weren't for the community there would be no Boys & Girls Clubs," said program director Paul Allen Jr.

Allen said the best part of working with kids is seeing them grow.

"When we help them with homework, sports it helps me wake up in the morning," he said. "It's better than my paycheck."

Hartzell said people should tour the clubhouses.

"See them when kids are around, see the programs they've got going," he said.

The clubs serve more than 900 kids ages 6 to 17 after school at clubhouses in Redlands, Mentone, Loma Linda, and San Bernardino.

Kids are charged \$15 a year; it costs the clubs \$1,000 per child per year.

"We have a lot of single-parent families, we've got grandparents raising the child, two parents working," said program services director Mark Davis. "(This event) helps keep prices low."

At Chocolate Fantasy, businesses vie for best chocolatier, best restaurateur and best decorations. This year's winners were a repeat from 2009 - Michelle's Bakery, best chocolatier; Mill Creek Cattle Co., best restaurateur; and Bon Appetit, best decorations.

Besides food and champagne, there was dancing and live music by B.O.E., and live and silent auctions.

E-mail Staff Writer Joy Juedes at [jjuedes@redlandsdailyfacts.com](mailto:jjuedes@redlandsdailyfacts.com)