

# Santa Cruz's clam to fame

Thousands attend 31st annual chowder festival

By TODD GUILD

OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

For self-described "chowder-head" Greg Harris, coming to the 31st annual Clam Chowder Cook Off and Festival Saturday in Santa Cruz was nothing less than a pilgrimage.

The 42-year-old Cupertino resident purposely skipped breakfast and purchased three tasting kits at \$9 each so he could dive into the experience.

With more than 60 giant steaming cauldrons of Boston and Manhattan style chowders at his disposal, Harris said he had developed a specific order of the contestants whose fares he would sample.

"We're talking chowder here," he said, as he waited at the booth run by Severino's Bar & Grill for the 1 p.m. tasting to begin. "I look forward to this for months."

Harris said he has been coming to the event for the past 10 years.

He joined thousands of other people who visited dozens of booths, sampling from more

than 60 giant steaming cauldrons of Boston and Manhattan style chowders.

Competition at the festival is fierce and the rules are strict: chefs can't begin to cook — or even chop their vegetables — until the morning of the contest. They have only two hours to make several gallons, and the experienced teams know they must make as much as 30 gallons to meet demand.

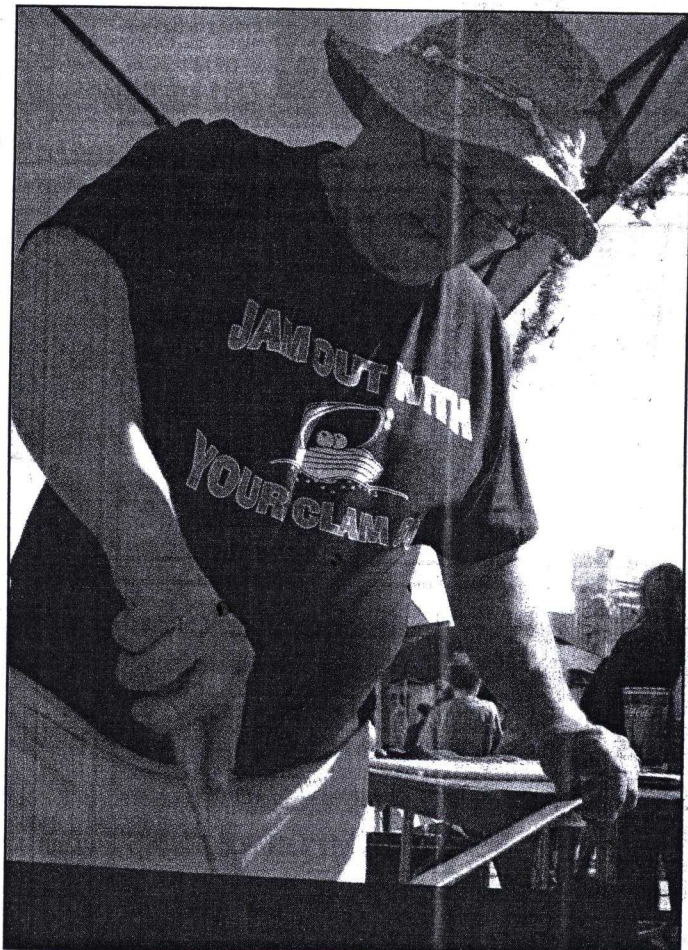
Jim Duggan, whose team, "Jam Out With Your Clam Out," was chopping bacon and pancetta, said the recipe had been perfected over the 10 years he had been in the competition.

While he was close-lipped about his ingredients, Duggan said his team steered clear of experimentation.

"The secret is to stay traditional," he said.

Duggan's team would not win any accolades in the competition, but Loulou's Griddle in the Middle, located on Municipal Wharf 2 in Monterey, took home

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Jim Duggan of the group, "Jam Out With Your Clam Out," stirs chopped bacon and pancetta.

## CHOWDER

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the People's Choice award for a professional organization.

"It's a recipe we've perfected for the past 10 years," co-owner Gigi Davis said. "We really put our heart and soul into our food."

Aegis of Aptos, an assisted living senior community, won awards for its Boston chowder in 2008 and 2009. They didn't win Saturday, but an award was the secondary mission: Executive Director Griselda Galvan said the event is a way to highlight the menu offered to the seniors at Aegis.

"Just like in the best restaurants," she said.

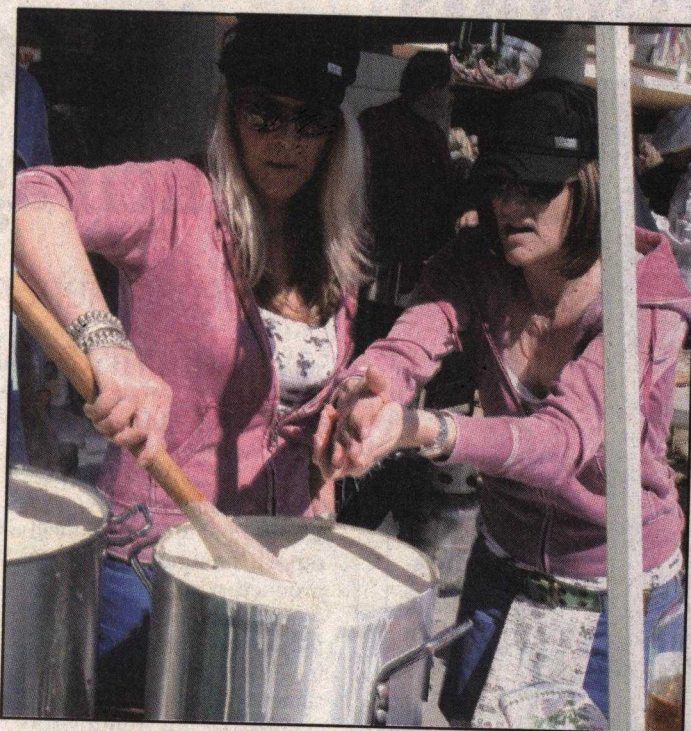
Fernando Luis, food services manager for UC Santa Cruz's Dining Services, said his team wins an award every year.

Indeed, the school's Manhattan-style chowder took home the People's Choice award Saturday for a professional organization.

"It's so much fun," Luis said. "It's also good for teamwork. And who doesn't like a competition?"

While many of the businesses competing in the event admitted that their participation was a great way to publicize themselves, several others had a much simpler reason.

"We're here for the fun of it," said Tamara Doan, who described her group, "For the Love of Clams," as "friends and foodies



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Jen Woods (left) and Amy Gilmore, of Aptos, prepare chowder for their group, "Clammamma ding-dong."

who get together and cook."

Doan said the group had been making chowder for the past 12 weeks before settling on the one they brought to the festival.

The biggest challenge, she said, was to keep cooking throughout the day so that all of the hundreds of visitors would get fresh chowder.

Modesto resident Marina Andrews, 17, who came with her sister and parents, said they were on a mini-vacation when they happened upon the festival. After that, their attendance became somewhat mandatory.

"My mom is, like, in love with chowder," she said.

Matthew Keane, 12, of Santa Cruz, said he frequently participates in events through the Santa Cruz Parks and Recreation Department, which benefits from the event.

The festival has raised more than \$950,000 since it started in 1981.

Keane's main reason for coming, however, was more culinary than a desire to support an important cause.

"I love clam chowder," he said. "And I thought this would be really good."