



John Webster

The Cockle Breath clam team of Watsonville got a chuckle while cooking chowder Saturday at the 11th annual clam chowder cook-off at the Board-

walk. Team members include, from left, Bruce Gabriel, Kevin Pedemonte, Jeff Skocko, Bill Haimbach and Lou Clinton.

# Sun shines on chowder cook-off

## A big day at the Boardwalk for people who dig clams

By STACEY VREEKEN  
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Although this winter's wet weather dampened the number of entrants to the 11th annual Clam Chowder Cook-Off, a sunny day Saturday brought out hundreds of chowder hounds ready to sup soup at the Santa Cruz Boardwalk.

About 60 amateur and professional chefs vied to create the best Manhattan (red) and Boston (white) clam chowder, with trips to Boston handed out as prizes.

Heading east this year will be People's Choice A.R.A. White Clam Diggers, headed up by Joe Rodriguez from Menlo Park, and Best Restaurant Manhattan from San Jose's Garden City, led by Gamboa.

Garden City also won third place for best restaurant Boston, and The A.R.A. restaurant was a winner from last year.

Other winners were Mom's

Chowder, by Veronica Corbett from Watsonville, for best individual Manhattan; Jason and the Clamanauts, by San Jose's Jason Martinez, for best individual Boston; and California Clams, by Miguelito from Los Gatos, for best restaurant Boston.

Cooking started Saturday at 11 a.m., and by 1 p.m., samples were being offered to those who purchased the \$5 tasting kits.

All the entrants to the cook-off decorated their booths to attract tasters, some more successfully than others. The winner of most original team was Spanky's Cafe from Ben Lomond, decked out as a silver-foil diner, complete with a picture of Elvis and a couple of stools. Other notables' efforts included the accordion player for Giovanni's booth (although he didn't know "Lady of Spain") and the beach shack at Judy's Clam Diggers.

The colorful Wizard's Spicy

Chowder, headed by Capitola's Anthony M. Santos, was the most-tasted in the individual and media categories, and Riff's Country Chowder, headed by Lucas Santana from Milpitas, was most-tasted restaurant.

A panel of 20 judges, made up of culinary professionals, politicians, media types and former San Francisco Giant Mike Sadek, broke into groups and began tasting soup at 1:30 p.m.

Soups ranged from thick and creamy to thin as minestrone. Some were packed with vegetables and clams, others had a few mysterious ingredients.

Some of the more unusual offerings included the Hungarian peppers in Jeff Skocko's Cockle Breath, from Watsonville, or the papaya, Anaheim peppers and cilantro in the Serious Slug Team's offering.

But don't scoff, the Slugs, led by Roland Belisle from UC-Santa Cruz, actually won second

place in the best restaurant, Boston, category.

Some booths gave extras away, like the clam dip at Mr. D's (Devin Guluzzo won second for individual Boston) and the specially-coated oyster crackers at the first-time Fielding Boys booth.

Second and third winners included Aptos Red, from Daniel Varela, of Stockton, placing second for individual Manhattan; and Amezquita's Mosquitoes Red Team, from Tom Amezquita, of San Jose, showing third.

Pontiac Grill, led by Catherine Daniels, of Santa Cruz, placed second for restaurant Manhattan; and Santa Cruz Brewing Company, led by Timi Geringer, of Santa Cruz, took third.

As the soups cooled, the late-afternoon clouds rolled in and winners were announced, chowder hounds headed for home. Contestants were already planning for next year.