



Sugar Lovers Get Just Desserts

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Saturday was a fantasy for anyone with a sweet tooth at the first New England Dessert Showcase. Hosted by the Anthem Entertainment Group at the Marriot Long Wharf, approximately 3,000 people came to sample New England's finest confectionery, allowing producers and consumers to share their passion for all things dessert.

While the Showcase featured a cocktail reception on Friday and an after-party on Saturday, the main event was the six hours of sampling that occurred from morning until afternoon. Thirty-six vendors were present at the event, ranging from large companies to smaller local businesses.

For a \$25 ticket, guests were treated to free samples, as well as chef demonstrations. Finale's executive pastry chef, Nicole Coady, prepared her special pralines recipe, providing tips to the audience on how to "temper," or melt down, chocolate and which kind of almonds work best.

Mike Prerau, a Ph.D. student who writes a blog called "The Food Monkey," was the master of ceremonies for the demonstrations. He cited Coady's demonstration as a highlight of the day. "She's one of the very best pastry chefs," he says, "and since it's been a very busy event and festival weekend, we were very proud to get her."

Despite other festivals in Boston on the weekend, such as the Phantom Gourmet Food Festival, the New England Dessert Showcase was able to draw a large crowd. Brittany Hubbard drove from Newburyport, MA to attend the festival and plans to come back next year. "It's a nice thing to do on a Saturday in September," she says. "Everyone put up a good display."

"We were very purposefully trying to have a diversity of vendors," says Chris Sinclair, the President and Founder of Anthem Entertainment. Their efforts were successful, as local bakeries and caterers, such as Jamiaca Plain-based Sister Nadine's, were sharing the room with larger chocolatiers like Godiva.

Vendors came for a multitude of reasons, but all of them were looking to present their own specialty to the attendees. Paul Conforti, a Harvard Business School graduate and co-founder of Finale, felt that being a local business was an extra incentive to attend. "We consider ourselves a leader in the dessert category in the city. We do not generally participate in these kinds of events, since we try to focus on the experience in the restaurant," he says. "But something about this one struck a chord."

"We do a huge internet business, but it's not always so fun because you can't see people's reactions and see them trying the food," says Meggen Beaulier the COO of Simply Divine, a Maine-based bakery that dedicates itself to special-topping brownies. "We've done a lot of national appearances like "The Rachel Ray Show," but people don't usually get to try the product."

Even though Maya Seigel, a senior at Brandeis, had expected more vendors, she did not leave disappointed. "I've been to Comic-Con, and I was expecting a Comic-Con-sized dessert fair," she says. "But overall it's pretty fantastic. This should happen more often."

The idea for the event came from what appeared to be a void in the market. "We thought this was a fun idea that no one had picked up before in this area," says Erica Johnson, an events and marketing manager at Anthem, which organizes various events for the 20-30 year old demographic in Boston. Attendees ranged in age from young to old, but everyone seemed to be connected by a love of sweets. Mariel K. Sena '13 claims, "It was the best \$25 I've ever spent."

For all of the success of the festival, the only problem may have been that the event was too successful for its own good. Over-indulgent attendees could be seen lounging at tables hoping that their appetite would return. "We've only been here for 20 minutes," Hubbard laments, "and we've already had too much sugar!"

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