



PARTY (HEARTY)

11 CULINARY FESTIVALS TO DINE FOR BY KENNY SPAHN

Ready, set – eat! South Florida is renowned for an extensive menu of food festivals, where throughout the year epicureans are treated to a bevy of culinary experiences that transcend the traditional sit-down meal. These fare-filled events are packed with fine wines, tasty foods and decadent desserts – not to mention entertainment, prizes and meet-and-greets with the culinary elite. Even better, they all benefit various charities. The following are 11 food festivals with a purpose.





LEFT: Chefs at Boca Bacchanal. BELOW: Wine tasting at Boca Bacchanal.



BANK OF AMERICA WINE AND CULINARY CELEBRATION

The Fort Lauderdale **Bank of America Wine and Culinary Celebration**, which takes place April 24, 2009 at the Museum of Discovery & Science in Fort Lauderdale, features not just scrumptious food and fine wines, but a fun ambiance with awesome displays and state-of-the-art interactive games (you may even learn something between bites). Expect entertainment, auctions, seminars, VIP receptions and the chance to meet your favorite chefs and sommeliers. There's also a People's Choice contest, where chefs pull out all the stops (during this year's event, Stork's Bakery set up a 42-foot dessert gondola). More than 1,000 guests enjoyed the 2008 event, which featured 30 top South Florida restaurants and raised \$105,000 for the Museum. FOR MORE INFORMATION, CALL 954-713-0911 OR VISIT MODS.ORG.



Tasting, which takes place at the Mizner Park Amphitheater. Expect food from dozens of area restaurants, plus hundreds of fine wines and a separate area for desserts, coffees and dessert wines (this year's event attracted 1,500 patrons and raised more than \$500,000 for the Boca Raton Historical Society). A wine luncheon, tasting and seminar at Lynn University, along with a Taste of Napa concert, makes this a weekend to remember. FOR MORE INFORMATION, CALL 561-395-6766 OR VISIT BOCABACCHANAL.COM.

CELEBRATION OF SUMMER

One of Palm Beach County's longest-running culinary events, the 18-year-old **Celebration of Summer** event is a major component of Boca Raton's annual Summer Festival Days. More than 600 patrons attended this year's chi-chi cocktail party, which featured delicacies from more than 20 restaurants and wine booths, live and silent auctions and a performance by saxophonist Will Bridges; proceeds benefited Hospice By The Sea. FOR 2009 DATES AND MORE INFORMATION, CALL 561-395-5031 OR VISIT HOSPICEBYTHESEAFL.ORG.

BOCA BACCHANAL

A tribute to Bacchus, the God of wine, **Boca Bacchanal** celebrates culinary appreciation with a weekend of activities. The event (named one of *Wine Spectator* magazine's Top 20 wine festivals), takes place March 1, 2009, beginning Friday with a slate of celebrity vintner dinners, followed by a Saturday night dinner and auction at the Boca Raton Resort & Club.

The event's *piece de resistance* is Sunday's Grand

CHOCOLATE DECADENCE FESTIVAL

Sugar-coma alert: The aptly named **Chocolate Decadence Festival**, which takes place February 5, 2009, is known as the "Sweetest Party in Town". The event takes place in honor of Valentine's

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Day at The Shops of Boca Center, where dozens of local restaurants, chocolatiers, caterers, bakeries and confectioners allow lucky patrons to sample their wares. Besides all the chocolate, expect plenty of appetizers, spirits, music, art exhibits, music and other assorted frivolity. The festival is a major fund-raiser for The Junior League of Boca Raton, and this year raised nearly \$60,000. **FOR MORE INFORMATION, CALL 561-620-4778 OR VISIT BOCACHOCOLATE.COM.**



and mojito bars), live music and art displays. This year's event, held in October, drew more than 600 patrons and raised more than \$75,000 for the American

Lung Association of Florida and its child-oriented Lungs 4 Life program. **FOR 2009 DATES AND MORE INFORMATION, CALL 561-659-7644 OR VISIT FOODWINEANDARTEXPERIENCE.COM.**

LAS OLAS WINE AND FOOD FESTIVAL

One of Fort Lauderdale's most anticipated annual events is the **Las Olas Wine and Food Festival**, where more than 60 top chefs serve their signature dishes. The event, which is scheduled next year for May 1st and May 2nd, takes place along the charming, shop- and restaurant-dotted Boulevard (which gets closed off to traffic). The 2009 fest will feature 67 restaurants and 44 wine tables, along with live music, a VIP Lounge, wine dinners, education seminars and more. The event, which was named “The Best Wine Street Festival of the Year” by the United States Sommelier Association, last year attracted 2,000 visitors and raised \$170,000 for the American Lung Association of Florida. **FOR MORE INFORMATION, CALL 954-524-4657 OR VISIT LASOLASWINEANDFOOD.COM.**

CITYPLACE UNCORKED

You know it's summer when CityPlace in West Palm Beach throws its annual **CityPlace Uncorked** event, a fun-filled affair with food, spirits, auctions and live entertainment. This year's event, which took place in August at The Harriet Himmel Theater, showcased more than 100 wines (including some in limited production), a decadent dessert table and an exclusive VIP section. The sold-out event raised more than \$10,000 for West Palm 100, a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting area children, families and neighborhoods. **FOR 2009 DATES AND MORE INFORMATION, CALL 866-449-2489 OR VISIT CITYPLACE.COM.**

FOOD WINE AND ART EXPERIENCE

The **Food Wine and Art Experience**, a festival held in Lake Worth by the American Lung Association of Florida, is a feast for the senses. The event takes place at Lake Worth Cultural Plaza and features more than 40 restaurants, plus myriad wines (and martini

SIGNATURE CHEFS & WINE EXTRAVAGANZA

When it comes to culinary excellence, the March of Dimes' **Signature Chefs & Wine Extravaganza** raises the bar. As the name implies, the event is all about the chefs, and only a select group each year is chosen to participate. The tri-county event provides patrons the opportunity to savor top chefs' creations and meet their favorites, and





take place at the Boca Raton Resort & Club, as well as locations in Broward and Miami-Dade counties. Expect live entertainment and high-end auction prizes. This year's festival, which was held in October, featured 26 Signature Chefs and more than 500 attendees. Funds raised benefit the March of Dimes. **FOR 2009 DATES AND MORE INFORMATION, CALL 561-276-2001 OR VISIT MARCHOFDIMES.COM.**

SOUTH BEACH WINE & FOOD FESTIVAL

If there's one festival that stands out for its star power, it's the **South Beach Wine & Food Festival**, scheduled for February 19 through February 22, 2009. Set along sunny South Beach, this four-day culinary event is one of the world's largest (more than 35,000 patrons attended this year's festival). True foodies won't want to miss this party, which features an über-impressive array of internationally renowned chefs and vintners, and attracts hordes of media for its celeb cache (this year's Food Network royalty included Giada De Laurentiis, Bobby Flay, Ingrid Hoffmann, Paula Deen and more). The main event is the two-day Grand Tasting, where more than 100 restaurants feature tasty offerings and spirits (not to mention

some great people watching). Also on the menu is a smorgasbord of activities, from the famous Møet & Chandon BubbleQ to a Burger Bash hosted by Rachael Ray; also planned are book signings, cooking demonstrations, tribute dinners and an elaborate gala and silent auction. The Festival benefits Florida International University's School of Hospi-

tality and Tourism Management. **FOR MORE INFORMATION, CALL 1-877-762-3933, OR VISIT SOBEWINEANDFOODFEST.COM.**

TASTE OF THE GRAPE

Here's an opportunity to enjoy the lovely fall weather while sampling excellent food and wine for a good cause. **Taste of the Grape**, an outdoor food and wine festival that takes at Royal Palm Place in downtown Boca Raton, benefits G.O.A.L.S. (Go Out And Live Successfully), a foundation dedicated to helping people with spinal cord injuries. This year's event drew about 800 patrons, all of whom enjoyed more than 100 wines and fare from 20 top restaurants including Ruth's Chris Steak House, Casa D'Angelo and Max's Grille. Guests also were treated to live music, auctions and a raffle. **FOR 2009 DATES AND MORE INFORMATION, CALL 561-542-4068 OR VISIT TASTEOTHEGRAPE.COM.**

TASTE OF THE NATION

The granddaddy of food festivals is Share Our Strength's **Taste of the Nation**, which annually happens in 400 cities from May through August. Locally, the event takes place in Palm Beach, Broward and Miami-Dade counties. The largest takes place at the Broward County Convention Center, where more than 1,000 foodies enjoy food and drink from more than 30 top restaurants (VIP patrons also get early admission, a private VIP reception, reserved seating and a goodie bag). This year's Fort Lauderdale-based event raised more than \$90,000, which went toward funding 540,000 meals for hungry children (the Fort Lauderdale event has raised more than \$1.6 million dollars during the past 16 years). **FOR 2009 DATES AND MORE INFORMATION, VISIT TASTEOTHENATION.ORG OR STRENGTH.ORG. O**

TOP FROM LEFT: Sushi sampling at the Food Wine and Art Experience; Las Olas Wine and Food Festival; Chilling at the Las Olas Wine and Food Festival; Chefs at Taste of the Nation; patrons enjoy the Signature Chefs & Wine Extravaganza.

