

Chocolatefest raises funds for local Ronald McDonald House

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Hundreds of East Tennessee residents entered the Knoxville Expo Center on Saturday looking to satisfy their sweet tooth and more than likely left with a sugar high.

Chocolatefest, an annual charity event featuring everything chocolate — from the classic chocolate cupcake to chocolate-covered popcorn — benefitted the local Ronald McDonald House for its 2015 event.

Each vendor brought 1,500 samples of a sweet of their choosing for visitors to try while there or take home to enjoy, according to Larry Clark, owner of Sugarbakers supplies. The event also featured a silent auction, a chocolate art show and various shopping booths.

A Paula Deen impersonator and Frozen's Elsa also made appearances.

Sugarbakers' Hawaiian-themed booth featured pina colada-flavored chocolate lollipops and leis.

“Food is a huge thing,” said Clark, who has been part of Chocolatefest since year one more than 20 years ago. “People love sweets. That’s just the way it is. And to have an event that kids can come to — not just adults — it’s just awesome.”

Clark said it’s the fun — and the charity — of Chocolatefest that keeps him coming back.

Sue Beverly, executive director of Knoxville's Ronald McDonald House and self-proclaimed “chief chocolate tester,” said the Ronald McDonald House remains active because of events like Chocolatefest.

The Ronald McDonald House, which has been active 30 years in March and has served more than 50,000 people, acts as a home for families with critically ill children receiving treatment at nearby hospitals, according to Beverly.

“If a family can’t afford a \$5 a night gift to stay at the house, it’s completely free, no questions asked,” she said. “We’re trying to maintain 20,000 square feet helping 65 folks every night, so all these proceeds will go toward the operating budget to keep those doors open for families in need.”

Beverly also acted as one of four judges at Chocolatefest and said the winner was clear.

“To me anybody here today is already a winner for what they’re doing to help us and our families,” she said.

Nic Blair, 13, who attended Chocolatefest with his parents, named Kim’s Kandies’ white chocolate popcorn as his favorite treat at the halfway mark.

But he wasn’t stopping there. He said his ultimate goal was to “eat as much chocolate as I can. That’s what we came for.”

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