

Merchants Guild's first Chili Cook-Off unites businesses

By Tim Neral, for the Greene County Messenger | Posted: Friday, March 11, 2016 2:00 am

WAYNESBURG — The Merchants Guild, comprised of local businesses working together to develop the Waynesburg business district, held its first annual Chili Cook-Off on Feb. 28. And the reception for the event was as warm as the chili that was served.

For the first annual chili cook off, a handful of local businesses crafted their own recipes and offered samples to visitors. Those who participated were able to sample the recipes at 11 different locations in Waynesburg, and also vote for their favorite and contribute to a great cause at the same time.

After purchasing a \$5 wristband at any of the participating venues, chili lovers made their way from place to place, savoring chili done 11 ways, from mild to hot. They were also able to vote for their favorite by dropping off a canned good in a bin or donating dollars at each venue. The winner who received the most votes received an illustrious golden ladle.

All proceeds from the competition are going to Greene County's Corner Cupboard Food Bank.

The venues included Bonnie Belle's Country Store, Artbeat Gallery, 5Kidz Kandy, Ruff Creek Crafts & Antiques, Fischer Antiques, Fashion Shoppe, Purse-n-Ality, B & B Jewelry, Ivy Green, Made in America Gifts and AJ's Rustic Star. All the businesses are a part of the Merchants Guild.

"In November, we started talking about what we wanted to do at the beginning of the year," said Jim Winegar, owner of Artbeat Gallery, which showcases 40 Greene County artists and another 40 outside the region in the Pittsburgh area.

Winegar said in a relatively sparsely populated area, the Merchants Guild wants to highlight what Waynesburg has to offer.

"Towns around the country have taken an original flavor," Winegar said. "Very few towns have what we have."

Winegar mentioned all of the travel he has done overseas. He says the environment in

Europe is vastly different from the one here in the United States.

“Our concept of suburb and the same eight entities off every one of our interstates has established a different atmosphere,” Winegar said.

That’s a culture that Winegar says small towns like Waynesburg are trying to confront. The whole purpose of the Merchants Guild is to put Waynesburg back on the map, he said, but he admits that there is more work to be done in achieving that goal.

Winegar thinks an important first step is infusing money back into the community. He explained that every dollar spent at a Waynesburg business makes its way around and it makes a difference.

The Merchants Guild’s tagline, “Creating community and commerce,” reflects that mission.

Kristy Vliet, owner of 5 Kidz Kandy, said she recognizes the importance of that mission as well as the importance of the Chili Cook-Off.

“It’s huge for us because it draws the people that wouldn’t haven stopped,” Vliet said. “It shows how our stores have evolved and changed over the seasons.”

The Merchants Guild has more events planned in the coming months, including a summer open house and a Rock the Chalk event. A dozen artists will create large-scale drawings during the course of an afternoon and at the end of the competition, a professional independent artist will award first-, second- and third-place and people’s choice.