

# Locals flock to Long Grove for chocolate delights

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**T**housands of people from across Lake County and beyond flocked to downtown Long Grove to enjoy chocolate-covered everything for its ever-popular Chocolate Fest on May 15, 16 and 17.

The event featured the typical, the unique and the in-between, from chocolate dipped strawberries and hot chocolate, to chocolate beer and burgers with chocolate barbecue sauce.

A big hit this year, as it was last year, was the five-for-five Chocolate Tasting Ticket where, for \$5, people looked for five of the 11 vendors listed on their ticket from which they wanted to grab a different piece of chocolate.

It was like a chocolate scavenger hunt.

After tasting a few chocolate toppings on pretzels, parents Sarah and Kieran Spelman of Oak Park helped toddlers Liam and Nolan use their tasting ticket to redeem a tasty piece of chocolate at Galena Canning Company.

"They are older this year, so we got them their own little chocolate tickets; we figured they could walk around a little bit and get a sugar high before nap time," Sarah laughed.

They also enjoyed the "Kid Zone," which featured organized games of tug of war, three-legged races, cookie eating contest, chocolate egg race and limbo competitions, rides, face-painting, balloon art and magic.

They said their 30-minute drive to Long Grove from Oak Park was worth it, if only for the chocolate.

Beyond those shops participating in the tastings, booths and shops around town peddled other chocolate food and beverages like chocolate mini tea bags at Potpourri, chocolate martinis at Enzo & Lucia Italian Restaurant, old fashioned chocolates and penny candy at Ma & Pa's Candy and Yoo-Hoo chocolate beverages at Nifty Fifty's. Chocolate-themed paraphernalia like chocolate scented candles and chocolate-themed T-shirts were also sold.

But the fest wasn't limited to chocolate.

Galena Canning Company set up an area outside where people could test out sweet and savory dips, salad dressings and toppings on chips and pretzels before purchasing them, if they felt so inclined.

Beth Fitterer of Cary laughed as daughter Ashley and boyfriend Jerome Stopper of Crystal Lake looked desperately for heat relief after testing out the company's "Fire in the Hole" salsa, the hottest salsa it makes.

"I tried the habanero one and my mouth is on fire, but not as much as theirs is," Beth said.

Their visit to the Chocolate Fest was Ashley's Mother's Day gift to Beth.

Each day of the fest, produced by Ravenswood Events and organized by Long Grove Business & Community

Partners, had live music from musical performers like the popular Beatles tribute band American English, Sixteen Candles and The Hot Sauce Committee, among others.

New this year was the Taste of Long Grove booth, where fare from Chatterbox of Long Grove, Enzo & Lucia Italian Restaurant, Long Grove Cafe Restaurant and The Village Tavern were available for sampling.

"This is the first year we're doing a Taste of Long Grove booth and showcasing our fabulous restaurants on the streets," said Kathy Bryja of Molise PR, the company handling the event's publicity. "Last year we shot an episode of Eating America with the Food Network at one of our festivals, and we realized that there [was] a demand for us to showcase our culinary talent here in Long Grove."

At the request of long-time fans of the fest, people didn't have to leave until 10 p.m. on Friday and Saturday and 7 p.m. on Sunday, which is later than the event has ran in the past. .

At about 5 p.m. Friday, everything started to clear out. Sharon Fine, executive director of the Long Grove Business and Community Partners, got nervous.

"I was really worried," said Fine, who was one of the festival's chief organizers. "Did we not advertise enough? Did we not do enough social media?"

Then, at 6 p.m., a new, younger crowd came rolling in to enjoy the festival's later hours.

Dana Muscolino, an LGBCP assistant, turned to Fine.

"She told me, 'Oh my gosh, everyone's my age!'" Fine recalled the twenty-something saying.

Overall, the weekend went smoothly, Fine added.

*Laura Pavin is a freelance reporter for Pioneer Press. Ronnie Wachter, a Pioneer Press reporter, contributed.*

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