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SOUTH BEACH WINE & FOOD FESTIVAL

Big bucks from South Beach Wine & Food Festival allows FIU to be 'glamorous'

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Money from the festival has allowed FIU's Chaplin School of Hospitality and Tourism Management to push to become a global research center for food and spirits.

BY EVAN S. BENN
EBENN@MIAMIHERALD.COM

Students at Florida International University are formulating toxin-fighting wine yeasts. They're crafting new ways to de-mineralize brewing water to make better beer. They're learning how to manage four-star restaurants in a \$7.5 million, state-of-the-art teaching lab and kitchen that Martha Stewart marveled at Wednesday night.

And they're doing it all with money generated from the South Beach Wine & Food Festival.

"We're a public university. We really shouldn't be that glamorous," said Mohammad Qureshi, an associate dean at FIU's [Chaplin School of Hospitality and Tourism Management](#). "The Wine and Food Festival has allowed us to be a little glamorous."

Qureshi, Stewart and about 120 other invited guests enjoyed white-glove service of lobster, caviar, wine and more at an inaugural dinner in the school's new Wine Spectator Restaurant Management Lab on Wednesday.

The event served as a curtain-raiser to the 13th annual [Food Network South Beach Wine & Food Festival](#), which runs [through Sunday](#) and is staffed by about 1,200 FIU student volunteers. The lavish dinner also was a thank you to festival and school contributors such as Southern Wine and Spirits, Wine Spectator and Badia Spices.

The Chaplin School is the sole beneficiary of the festival, receiving more than \$18 million to date. Last year's four-day festival drew about 65,000 people and brought in \$9.2 million in ticket sales and sponsorships; after accounting for operating costs, organizers wrote the school a check for \$2.1 million.

The 2014 South Beach Wine & Food Festival gets underway as Food Network stars and South Florida chefs mingle with the locals. CARL JUSTE/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

- [South Beach Wine & Food Festival: Feasts for the eyes, ears, and palates](#)
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MORE INFORMATION

Festival funds

Since 2002, the Food Network South Beach Wine & Food Festival has raised more than \$18 million for Florida International University's Chaplin School of Hospitality and Tourism Management. Here's a look at festival attendance and money generated for the school in recent years.

2013: 65,000 attendees, \$2.1 million given to FIU

2012: 60,000 attendees, \$2 million given to FIU

2011: 55,000 attendees, \$2.4 million given to FIU

2010: 50,000 attendees, \$2.2 million given to FIU

Much of the festival money generated over the years has gone toward student scholarships and upgrades to existing school equipment and facilities. The new, 120,000-square-foot Restaurant Management Lab, along with adjacent new Food Production and Brewing Sciences labs, is in many ways the first tangible monument of the longstanding relationship between the festival and the university.

The production lab has a kitchen centered around a 38-foot cooking line bigger than any other in South Florida, Qureshi said.

Its stainless-steel and aqua-backsplash walls are mounted with iPads to keep track of incoming orders,

and flat-screen TVs to monitor what's happening in the dining room or to pipe in guest lecturers from around the globe; cameras are positioned everywhere, like in a casino. A two-story wine tower in the dining room — named in honor of longtime Southern Wine executive Mel Dick — stores 1,000 bottles.

"The up-to-the-minute technology is extremely impressive. It's magnificent," said Stewart, who was Wednesday night's emcee. "It has been a real pleasure to watch the growth of this program. You are maintaining a standard that is really, really excellent."

Festival funds have enabled the Chaplin School to move toward a "vision of being a global food, wine, beer and spirits research center," FIU President Mark Rosenberg said.

Located at FIU's Biscayne Bay campus in North Miami, the Chaplin School has no intention of being a culinary college. Its aim is to groom its 1,500 undergraduate and graduate students into tomorrow's restaurateurs, brewery owners and winery consultants.

"We want to identify problems that the restaurant industry and winemakers and brewers are facing that aren't being solved by other academic institutions," said Mike Hampton, dean of the Chaplin School. "Then we want to solve them and have our students do it better than anyone else. We're trying to prepare students for careers around the world, for global companies like Diageo and InBev."

One of those students is Ariette Desrivieres, a hospitality management senior who enrolled at FIU after graduating from culinary school out of state. She runs a [catering business](#) and said she was looking for the management skills to expand her company.

"Food has always been my passion, but I want to grow my own business and not be cooking in someone else's restaurant every night," she said, plating a shrimp ceviche appetizer Wednesday prepared by chef Norman Van Aken. "Here, it's like they teach us to do it all. So when we get out, we hit the ground running."

Van Aken and co-chefs Michelle Bernstein, Mark Militello, Allen Susser, Cindy Hutson and Hedy Goldsmith carried out Wednesday's dinner with a small army of student helpers. (Bernstein's savory fried squash blossoms filled with prawn mousse and Goldsmith's tart lemon custard with olive oil cake and Florida grapefruit were standouts.)

Lee Schrager, the festival's founder and director, said he sought out those cooks because they were six of Miami's top chefs when the festival became his baby in 2002. From 1997-2001, a much-smaller, one-day event called the Florida Extravaganza took place at FIU's Biscayne Bay campus.

Hospitality junior Eduardo Mederos, 20, worked on a plate of breadfruit snapper tacos with Hutson, chef-owner of [Ortanique](#) in Coral Gables and Grand Cayman.

"It's my dream to open my own hotel," Mederos said. "A big part of hotel operations is food, which is why it's really helpful to work on events like this for a large group."

And on Wednesday night, work they did. It likely was the first time a student server had to respond to the request, "Martha Stewart's table needs forks — now!" (The students were sharp; Stewart's table promptly received forks).

Stewart was full of praise for the school and the new facilities. She credited the "tight bond" that has formed over the past 13-plus years between FIU and the South Beach Wine & Food Festival.

"In many ways, the school and festival really have grown up together," she said.

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