Martinis for a Cause

By Cathy Tyson and Jennifer Wake

From left, Amy Daggett, Kelly Mullane and Elisa Pimi enjoying their martinis   Photo Cathy Tyson

Why the long line of parked cars in front of the Lafayette Park Hotel last Monday night? Is Obama in town, could it be our first same sex marriage? No, this reporter and colleague Jennifer Wake had the extremely difficult job of covering the Ninth Annual Best Martini in the East Bay Contest. Sponsored by Level Vodka by Absolut and the Lafayette Park Hotel, the event featured fourteen bartenders, shaking up their signature martinis.

Cars not only lined Mt. Diablo Boulevard, but neighboring streets as well. Patrons, many in high heels, hiked for blocks to get a chance to sample these martinis.

Literally hundreds of twenty to fifty-somethings donated $20 for the event which benefits Project Second Chance, the Contra Costa Library program that helps adults learn to read. Although the final numbers aren't in, last year the event netted more than $13,000.

"We want to thank everyone who attended, by doing so, you advanced the cause of adult literacy," said Program Manager Laura Seaholm.

Bartenders from local watering holes lined the patio area and large reception room duking it out pouring three ounce samples of their 'tini's in the hopes of winning two awards and bragging rights; the Best Martini title from a panel of judges and the People's Choice Award voted on by slightly sloshed attendees. Swinging background music on this lovely summer evening was provided by Generations in Jazz.

Judges gave Zio Fredo's "Thai 'tini" first place, with Havana's "Tamarind 'tini" garnering second place and Yankee Pier bringing home third with their "Lady Bug" cocktail. The People's Choice award went to Morrisey's Chop House for their "Tiramisu 'tini."

Noting the preponderance of pear based beverages, Kelly Mullane said, "Pear is the new pomegranate." She and her pal Amy Daggett agreed that they are "down with drinking for charity." Ms. Wake and I couldn't agree more.