Lafayette holds Celtic Bayou Festival just in time for St. Patrick’s Day celebration

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Nestled cozily within Cajun country, the Celtic Bayou Festival brings a little bit of Celtic luck to the Lafayette area.

Started by two Riverdancers from New York, Tony and Sheila Davoren fell in love with the rich culture of the Lafayette area and began their journey to start this festival some four years ago. Since then, the Celtic Bayou Festival has blossomed into a St. Patrick’s Day weekend of traditional Celtic fun.

Beyond multiple stages of Celtic music, roaming kilt-wearing bagpipe players and a full-blown whiskey tasting event, the Celtic Bayou Festival brings a unique cooking event — a Guinness cook-off. It is the first and only of its kind around the world.

This year seven chefs competed in the competition, cooking everything from a Guinness chili to a Guinness duck and andouille gumbo. Multiple alumni of the University of Louisiana at Lafayette competed in the cook-off as well.

“This is the first time I cook with beer,” Aaron Landry, a contestant from Carencro said, “With Guinness especially, I’m pretty happy with the results. I think this might be my new thing. I don’t think I’m going to use water ever again. The beer gave it a night color and a nice flavor.”

Even before the 4 p.m. tasting time, festival-goers lined up waiting for a taste of the delicious food they had been smelling all day, especially with the food tents set up right next to one of the music stages.

The 2018’s winner Ret Guillory of Black Pot sat their trophy out on the table, right next to food ready to taste.

“Last year, we did an Irish stew. This year, (we did) short ribs but it’s going to be with a Guinness, pepper jelly reduction glaze on top.” Black Pot’s cook, Guillory said. “This is the third time we’ve made this. We thought about it last week, tweaked it a bit and we did a batch earlier today.”

Happily, for Guillory, this third batch of short ribs was enough to take home the Guinness Cook-off trophy.

The musical highlight of the festival came in the form of the Acadian trio, Vishtèn. The trio, who come from Canada, meld traditional French songs the Celtic genre and in the past, saw recognition as an ambassador of Francophonie culture around the world.

“We partnered with Festival International, the Consulate General of Canada and Dallas and the Center for Louisiana Studies to bring in Vishtèn,” Maegan Smith, a board member of the Celtic Bayou Festival said.

Other highlights included a redheaded and freckle contest, a Bailey’s Bake-off, an Irish language lesson and a packed house performance by the Ryan School of Irish Dance. Though the day started off at 9:30 a.m. with a Tullamorning Dew Pub Crawl down the streets of Lafayette, festival goers stayed well into the night to see the festival close.

“I think more than a lot of people though, the Irish and people of Louisiana, they love a good time,” Tony Davoren said. “You know, you hear that a lot. ‘Passing a good time’ is very important here. And so is hard work. It’s very similar in Ireland. You work hard Monday to Friday then the weekends is party time.”

“Hand-crafted drinks were served to all who wanted. Photos by Brianne Hendricks/The Vermilion

Bagpipe players astonished the crowd with their music at the Celtic Bayou Festival.