

Vegans, Vegetarians Use Borough for 25th Anniversary Expo

The Vegetarian Society of South Jersey celebrate 25 years at the Collingswood Community Center this Sunday.

By Rachel Witte, September 19, 2011

The Vegetarian Society of South Jersey's 25th Anniversary and International Food Festival catered to Collingswood's taste buds Sunday—minus the meat.

Held at Collingswood Community Center, the gathering of local vegans and vegetarians had the borough swirling in appetizers donated by Marlton-based Whole Foods, and a gourmet buffet vegan dinner from Miss Rachel's Pantry, a vegan catering company based in Philadelphia.

In addition to food, Sunday's activities included a silent auction, bucket auction, vendor displays and live music by Scoville Blues and Reid Alburger.

A roster of speakers relevant to the society's mission—of educating the public on the benefits of vegetarianism—added their own flairs to the expo.

Cherron Perry-Thomas, renowned vegan and co-founder of the Dandelion Bunch, presented a raw food demonstration.

Michael Gregor, director of public health and animal agriculture for the Humane Society of the United States, headlined the evening, with a speech and nutrition activity.

Vendors at the event included Dr. Donna Skerry, a nutritionist who practices in Philadelphia and nearby Westmont. Skerry offered guests information about ADD and ADHD prevention, as well as its ties to nutrition and healthy eating.

"We could prevent a lot of diseases with nutrition changes," said Skerry.

Sunday's took an entire year to organize, according to Lorraine Bal, membership and event coordinator for Vegetarian Society of South Jersey (VSSJ).

"Knowing the 25th anniversary was coming, a group of officers starting talking about what we'd like to do, looking for a venue and doing the planning," said Bal of Sunday's expo.

And the event drew a multitude of vegan and vegetarian enthusiasts.

Among them was 25-year vegetarian and VSSJ President Janet Erickson, who recognized a need for unity amongst her like-minded friends and fellow vegetarians.

"I figured we needed to have support for what we were doing," said Erickson of VSSJ, which began meeting in a church, and later took out a newspaper ad prompting vegetarians to gather for an inaugural potluck dinner.

Today, the group still holds monthly potlucks, movie nights, restaurant outings and picnics.

"It's nice to have events for people to come together and share in (the experience)," said Erickson.

Freya Dinshah, editor of *American Vegan* and president of the American Vegan Society, is a 25-year VSSJ member.

"It is a very good organization for people to find community, which is important when you're trying to be a vegetarian, especially if you're on your own in your family or group of friends," said Dinshah.

For VSSJ members like Jeff Goodfellow—who's been traveling from Pennsylvania to attend VSSJ events for eight years—Sunday's expo was a great way to celebrate the organization's importance.

"We should have events like this every year," said Goodfellow. "(After all), vegetarianism and veganism are both growing."

PHOTOS (12):



A silent auction rounded out the event's entertainment. Credit [Rachel Witte](#)



Local vegans and vegetarians gathered to celebrate the VSSJ on Sunday. Credit: [Rachel Witte](#)



Members of the Vegetarian Society of South Jersey enjoying Sunday's celebration. Credit: [Rachel Witte](#)



Friends of the VSSJ gathered to support the organization's mission. Credit: [Rachel Witte](#)



Vegan and vegetarian cookbooks were on display and for sale. Credit: [Rachel Witte](#)



The Vegetarian Society of South Jersey celebrated 25 years on Sunday. Credit: [Rachel Witte](#)



Vegetarian appetizers were donated by Whole Foods in Marlton, NJ. Credit: [Rachel Witte](#)



Members of the VSSJ celebrate 25 years as an organization. Credit: [Rachel Witte](#)



Sunday's celebration included a silent auction and bucket auction. Credit: [Rachel Witte](#)



Local vegetarians joined together for food, fun and entertainment. Credit: [Rachel Witte](#)



VSSJ volunteer, Stephanie Scarpa, helped with the event's bucket auction. Credit: [Rachel Witte](#)



The VSSJ fosters community for local vegetarians and hosts social gatherings every month. Credit: [Rachel Witte](#)