

Posted by [admin](#) on 4/29/10 • Categorized as [Arts & Entertainment](#), [Food & Drink](#)

By Pat Sherman  
SDUN Assistant Editor



Food and wine aficionados will have a chance to savor cuisine from more than 70 of San Diego's top restaurants and chefs during the 19th annual Mama's Day event, May 7 at 6:30 p.m. at the Hyatt Regency La Jolla Aventura.

Proceeds from the upscale tasting, considered to be one of San Diego's premier culinary fêtes, benefit Mama's Kitchen, which delivers nutritious meals to people living with HIV/AIDS or cancer throughout the county – three times a day, seven days a week.

The event will include a variety of food, wine, gourmet coffee and dessert, live music, and a silent auction and prize drawings, including gourmet gift baskets, dinners at local restaurants and skybox seats for Padres games.

Local television personality Vic Salazar will serve as emcee, and Sam Zien, a.k.a. “Sam the Cooking Guy” of Discovery Health channel, returns as the event’s culinary ambassador, mingling with guests throughout the evening.

“It’s a wonderful opportunity for ‘Sam the Cooking Guy’ fans to meet and chat him up, as he is very accessible,” said Scott Gardner, president of the organization’s board of directors. “He’s a wonderful supporter of Mama’s Kitchen.”

Guests will have a chance to win one of two “wine vaults” filled with 24 bottles of premium wine, including an eclectic array of varietals from Robert Foley Vineyards, Kistler Vineyards, Stags’ Leap Winery, Ca’Marcanda and others.

New participants this year include Starlite, Bing Crosby’s Restaurant and Piano Lounge, Bice Ristorante, Rama restaurant, Eclipse Chocolat, El Vitral Restaurant and Tequila Lounge, Celadon, PrepKitchen, Toast Enoteca & Cucina and Vela at the Hilton San Diego Bayfront hotel.

“We have some of the most cutting-edge chefs, restaurants and catering operations in the city,” Gardner said. “It’s kind of a (combination of) competition and camaraderie. There’s a sort of unspoken competition to capture the greater San Diego foodie population’s attention. It really lets the chefs be in a chef’s playground.”

Schulyer Schultz, executive chef of Bing Crosby’s in Fashion Valley, will serve a grilled steak salad with spring greens, sherry vinaigrette, Kalamata olives and blue cheese.

Bing Crosby’s general manager, Chris Enea, has worked at restaurants in the past that participated in Mama’s Day and thought it would be a good way to give back to the community and promote his business.

“The customers at previous restaurants I worked at really thought it was a great thing to do,” Enea said.

Alberto Cortes, executive director of Mama’s Kitchen, said this year’s event has drawn a record number of culinary artists.

“We’ve never had over 70 restaurants participating,” Cortes said.

That’s good news for the organization, which has been impacted by the economy and saw a decrease in attendance at last year’s event, which reaped about \$170,000.

Organizers hope to raise \$185,000 this year. Proceeds from the event account for 15 to 20 percent of the organization’s annual budget, which includes 10 paid staff members. Mama’s Kitchen also runs a food bank for people living with AIDS.

“It takes about \$2 million a year to run this organization,” said Cortes, one of three senior staff members who took a 5 percent pay cut last year due to the economy. Other staff members have seen their salaries frozen for close to 18 months, he said.

“I’m hoping last year was the most difficult year,” Cortes said. “Every dollar these days is more difficult to raise.”

The high-profile event, considered a “friend-raiser” as much as a fund-raiser, also gives the organization a chance to broadcast its name and mission to potential private and corporate donors, Cortes said.

“It’s so critical to have the word out so that we can be on people’s radar when they’re considering what organizations they’re going to support,” Cortes said.

Between 2008 and 2009, the number of clients receiving home-delivered meals from Mama’s Kitchen increased by 25 percent, from 605 to 759.

“Last year the pantry saw more visits than we had ever seen – over 4,200,” Cortes said. “The first year we offered the pantry, in 2004, there were about 2,300 visits.”

Though donations to the food bank were down considerably last year, the number of volunteers actually increased, Cortes said. The organization currently has about 650 volunteers.

“We were able to finish the year providing 17 percent more meals on a budget that was hundreds of thousands of dollars less,” Cortes said. “Volunteers put in a little over 100,000 miles traveling to deliver food, and just shy of 30,000 hours. If we didn’t have the volunteers and the benefit of the hours and the efforts they put in, it would have cost us an additional \$750,000 in 2009.”

Laurie Styron, an analyst with charityworks.org, said organizations across the country such as Mama’s Kitchen have been seeing an increase in volunteers during the down economy.

“Some of it is certainly altruism, but another aspect of it is people are just available when previously they haven’t been,” Styron said. “People who’ve been unable to find work are using volunteering as an opportunity to gain valuable experience to improve their resume or, in some cases, they’re looking for networking opportunities. It’s definitely better than sitting at home waiting for a job to come to you.”

Mama’s Day: A Tradition of Taste

WHEN: May 7, 6:30 p.m.

WHERE: Hyatt Regency La Jolla Aventine, 3777 La Jolla Village Dr.

COST: \$125 pre-sale; \$150 at the door; \$250 with VIP reception and complimentary bar

INFO: [mamaskitchen.org](http://mamaskitchen.org) or 233-6262