

Change in the Wine

With an experienced new director and meticulous record keeping, the **Aspen Food and Wine Classic** remains a culinary legend.



ALL PHOTOS BY PERRY JOHNSON AND ALLAN ZEPEDA

BY KRISTY ALPERT

AS THE ROWS AND ROWS OF FANATICAL FOODIES AND FAMED FLAMBEAUS settled down to watch the grand finale event of the Aspen Food and Wine Classic, one man stood silently as tales of legendary experiences from years past circulated around the garlanded space.

Despite the fact that he had never attended the event before, Tobias Rimkus, director of catering for the St. Regis Aspen (Colorado), only months on the job, remained cool as the final cook-

off began to heat up inside the halls of his newly claimed domain. This polished German joyfully focused his attention on keeping his client happy without stressing over possible missed details, thanks in part to the hotel's changeover plan and the festival meeting planners' diligence in keeping copious records and notes about how the event is executed each year.

A Famous Festival

Acting as the year's culmination of cu-

linary craftsmanship, the Aspen Food and Wine Classic is a three-day celebration of all things food and features more than 80 cooking demos, wine and interactive seminars, panel discussions, tasting events and classes on food and wine pairing—as well as twice-daily grand tastings, featuring more than 300 winemakers, craft brewers, distillers and specialty food vendors.

Each year, the town of Aspen sizzles as the world's top-rated culinary greats come together for a weekend celebrat-

“The Aspen Food and Wine Classic demonstrates our relevancy in the celebrated world of exceptional food and wine, and it also sets the stage for our partnership with *Food and Wine* magazine,” said Jaime Moscatello, group account director for The St. Regis Aspen and an active member of MPI since 2002.

ing all things food related. It’s here that foodies can mingle alongside their favorite celebrity chefs in the Grand Tasting Pavilion’s numerous open-air tents and courtyards, sip wine with master sommeliers at private tastings throughout the town and attend lavishly orchestrated events at the few choice hotels selected for the festival’s restricted roster.

This year’s celebration marked 31 years of exceptional food and drink offerings, and tickets were as coveted as

ever for those seeking exclusive access to the nation’s top chefs, the latest industry trends and culinary demos from the world’s most renowned winemakers, chefs, master sommeliers, brewmasters, mixologists and food craftsmen.

“The Aspen Food and Wine Classic demonstrates our relevancy in the celebrated world of exceptional food and wine, and it also sets the stage for our partnership with *Food and Wine* magazine,” said Jaime Moscatello, group account director for The St. Regis Aspen and an active member of MPI since 2002.

In Good Hands

Even though the weekend truly operates as a well-oiled machine, when the former director of catering stepped down less than a year before the 2013 event, The St. Regis Aspen staff refused to take any risks when training a replacement. With so much riding on this event, and with such a longstanding legacy in the catering industry and in the community of Aspen as a whole, they rallied their changeover resources and hired the best man for the job—though he had never even attended this festival.

Even with the reputation this iconic festival holds in the hearts of the most discriminating culinary and event-planning circles, Rimkus didn’t bat an eyelash when taking on the proverbial reigns of the hotel’s planning process. His confidence came not only from a career filled with directing events large and small and lessons learned along the way but also from the hotel’s elaborate notes and records about the real secrets behind the festival’s continued success.

The changeover from one event planner to another isn’t always a seamless transition, oftentimes peppered with poorly communicated systems and overlooked important details. For-

tunately for Rimkus, the St. Regis Aspen—along with the Aspen Business Chamber and the team at *Food and Wine* magazine—invested early on in a system that would promote successful successions and avoid personality-driven events.

“I always say that with our jobs, we have to have a certain technical knowledge about what we’re talking about in terms of food preparation and in regards to the specific needs of what is required. But I think when it comes down to it, a successful event is a testament to successful communication, really,” Rimkus said. “In our industry, events truly are living organisms. Things are changing in our world so rapidly and we simply have to be prepared for it. What we did a little while ago was sit down together to talk at length about the space arrangements, about what is going to be set aside and what is going to be similar.”

At that meeting, Rimkus was presented with a binder filled with years of notes and details about the event, including detailed images of previous setups, notes from the festival engineers and instructions on the best time to plant new grass for the festival grounds to make sure the scene is well sowed.

“Our hotel is in the midst of it here in Aspen,” he said. “We have a lot of people coming through our doors, and it’s a great opportunity to showcase what we do. So there was certainly a responsibility to make sure that I knew exactly what I needed to do and that my team was prepared with the right instructions.

“It was all about reading the materials detailing what happened in the past and looking at the photography available showing things such as how the kitchen setups by KitchenAid looked two years ago and how the flow worked for the events.”

MPI Foundation Presents

CANADA ROCKS 2013 THE ALBERTA WAY

It's more than just a fun-filled night of networking, regional cuisines and host bar; it's MPI Foundation Canada's premier fundraising event of the year.

Live country rock entertainment featuring nationally known Canada Alberta musical artists including live performances by WiL and Michael Benard Fitzgerald.



August 19th

Uniu Nightclub

473 Adelaide St. West, Toronto

Doors Open 7:30 pm

Canada Rocks...the official IncentiveWorks opening night.

Come and experience why you should always
"Remember to Breathe!"

Go to: www.mpiweb.org/foundation/canadarocks

Need not attend IncentiveWorks to purchase a ticket.

Funds raised are invested in initiatives that shape the future and bring success to the meetings and events community.



The Rimkus Files

When it comes to such high-profile events as the Aspen Food and Wine Classic, not much is open for discussion or interpretation. There is definitely a standard in place and expectations to be met, which is why the binder detailing all the event specifics was vital to the 2013 festival's success. Rimkus recommends any meeting professional take action immediately to prepare for the off chance that there will be turnover in the company or an emergency that takes the main player(s) out of the game. He recommends the following.

- **Talking to the town.** "It was very important for me to become part of the community," he said. "I think just spending the weekends out and about and time spent on a gondola provided great insights from locals. I mean, once you mention you work for the hospitality industry, everybody gets excited about offering their opinions since it's one of the biggest events here in Aspen."
- **Creating a binder** (virtual or hard-

copy). Rimkus recommends including everything. Items to include are updated contact information for major vendors, checklists sectioned out by weeks or days leading up to the event, color palates and more.

- **Trusting the team.** "A close friend of mine used to always say, 'I really don't want to be the smartest person in the room at any time,'" Rimkus said. "No one person can possibly know it all; it's the expertise of many, many people who are coming together to create this special event. We have to make sure everybody works as well together as possible to have a fantastic outcome again."

"Anyone who works in the event industry knows this is a story about how to get as many people involved as possible at an early point to create a buy-in within your own team while creating in-house experts as well so it doesn't all rest on your shoulders," Rimkus said. "It's very important to have clean doc-



umentation of everything that has been discussed with any client. When you bring the collective knowledge together, should one single person leave, such as my predecessor, there will be a lot of people in the organization who have a solid knowledge because they've been so engaged over the years." **one+**

.....
KRISTY ALPERT is a *One+* contributor based in Mississippi.

ELEVATE YOUR OPPORTUNITIES

Meet in Colorado Springs for blue skies, easy access and exceptional value.

Boost attendance and energize attendees in Colorado Springs. Our vibrant sunshine, convenient airport and fresh Rocky Mountain air will set the stage for a great meeting and elevate your event's opportunities.



CONTACT US TODAY!

Submit an RFP at **VISITCOS.com/meet** or call **800-888-4748 ext 132**

