

The best burger in Westchester for 2017 is ...

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The Burger & Beer Blast is always the hottest ticket of Westchester Magazine's Wine & Food Festival, and this year's competition was as packed as a ramekin of coleslaw at a diner.

On a temperate Thursday evening, more than 2,000 revelers gathered at Kensico Dam Plaza to sip cold brews, nibble piping-hot sliders and cast their vote for the Best Burger in Westchester — with over 30 local restaurants vying for the title.

In 2016, Peter X. Kelly from Xaviars X20 in Yonkers won first place — his fourth win in five years. For this year's competition, the celebrity chef built a prime beef slider composed of a proprietary blend of short rib and chuck, then topped it with Monterey jack cheese, diced hot cherry peppers for a hit of vinegar and heat, and a soft, salted pretzel bun to soak up all of the meat's juices.

"Each year we try to do something a little different," said the chef, straight off a plane from Eastern Europe, where he was promoting his Slovenia Vodka label, along with pal Bill Murray all week. "It's all for fun. I don't pay attention to (the votes)."

But others were.

"People keep asking why we don't have a sign up saying we've won so many times," said the chef's brother, Ned Kelly, while handing out trays full of freshly grilled patties to a crowd formed around the X20 table that was four-people deep.

"But, you're only as good as this year's burger."

When asked who she thought was the burger to beat this year, Barbara Gus, owner of The Piper's Kilt in Eastchester — which placed third in last year's competition — didn't hold back.

"I think we're the one to beat!" she said of her classic cheeseburger with sauteed onions.

But in the end, it was Coal's, a

grilled pizza and craft beer restaurant in Port Chester and Bronxville, that took home the crown.

"I'm so excited to win the Best Burger in Westchester this year, it's the best thing that's happened to me all year and I'm thrilled," said chef and owner Billy Etzel, whose beef burger with smoked Gruyere, maple-rosemary sauce and brown ale-cured dock bacon won over the crowds.

The Piper's Kilt did move up the podium to second place this year, with Gus's team looking very pleased as they exited the tents. Meanwhile, Madison Kitchen of Larchmont took third with chef Nick Di Bona's "Sir Madison Burger Sliders," featuring a 30-day dry-aged meat blend, Tickler cheddar cheese, bacon onion jam, MK sauce and a pretzel bun.

Westchester Magazine's Wine & Food Festival continues through Sunday. Tickets are required for all events, and are recommended purchased in advance.