

WINE COMPASS

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2008

South Beach Food & Wine Festival - FIU School of Hospitality and Tourism Management

The major benefactor of the South Beach Food and Wine Festival is [Florida International University's School of Hospitality and Tourism Management](#). This is one of the country's top hospitality management schools and attracts students from across the United States and over 90 countries. Graduates pursue careers in obvious choices such as restaurants and hotels, but also marketing, cruise lines, and even the wine industry.

The school's promise was in full display on Saturday as we met with student Alex Blanco, who planned FIU's contribution to the festival. Alex entered FIU as an independent but quickly chose to major in the Bachelor of Science in Hospitality Management after learning about the school. He had been a member of the school's participation at the Food & Wine Festival for the previous three years, but this year he took ownership of the operation by creating a menu, getting staff approval and coordinating its execution with the other students. This included procuring the food, the logistics of setting transporting and cooking the food, and even mundane problems as not having enough cups available on site. Saturday's menu was venison served with cucumber-hummus on a pita. The farm raised – free range - venison was donated by [Bush Brothers Provision Co.](#), the local providers of [Cervena New Zealand Venison](#). Throughout the day, a long line of attendees snaked their way to the kitchen – with the line moving rapidly as the students cooked and distributed the food. The venison was awesome, slightly pink and quite moist. The smooth operation was a testament to Mr. Blanco's planning and the execution of the students. Well done.

In addition to their culinary skills, the student's wine and beer making talents were also on display. Many of the students take several types of wine classes, from appreciation to wine-making technology to wine and beverage management. As part of the curriculum, Professor Barry Gump was able to obtain Merlot juice from his friend, Clark Smith of WineSmith. Some of the merlot grape were crushed, pressed, and then frozen and used to make a White Merlot. The remaining juice was frozen and half was used for this year's bottling of a semi-sweet Merlot and the rest is currently aging in American Oak to be opened during next year's festival. The students used their wine-making skills to make the White Merlot dry but with a fruit forward aroma and flavor – in a White Zinfandel fashion. The wine is remarkably clear and refreshing with a slight acidic finish. The semi-sweet Merlot reminded me of some of the Hungarian reds made a little sweeter – but not overly so. The wine is fruity and could also be served chilled. Since the student's did not have time to age the wine, this semi-sweet red was a great choice. Professor Gump also feels this wine would be attractive to a Midwestern audience. The students at the School of Hospitality and Tourism Management are obviously gaining an enjoyable, yet practical education.