



December 23, 2010

## Annual Red Cross gingerbread house decorating contest has its first double winner

By Mary Jane Park, Times Staff Writer

### 12.16.10

Veteran competitors in the annual Pinellas County gingerbread house decorating event to benefit the American Red Cross nearly always prepare for battle: I have seen shopping bags and rolling suitcases filled with ornamentation, event color-coordinated costumes, aprons and gloves.

This year was the first I've noticed power tools. When the drill came out - and this was at a table of first-time contestants - we judges knew the game was on.

The staff at the Don CeSar Beach Resort in St. Pete Beach, where the event takes place, provides the basic gingerbread structures, craterlike bowls of icing and a variety of candies - enough to fill many a Christmas stocking. (There are big bowls of lemon water for washing sticky hands, too.) Nice touch from executive chef **Eric Neri** and his team.

Beyond those essential ingredients, participants add the embellishments, which can be impressive.

The 2010 winners include **Katie Williams**, Rookie of the Year; **Stephanie Noyes**, for her all-edible creation; **Pamela Berger**, for a child's fantasy theme; **Anne Torke**, best traditional house; **Estella Woodard**, most fun; **Laura Zuppo**, most original; **Barbara Salazar**, best in show; and a first-time double winner: **Darren Kettles**, whose house got the most votes for a nonholiday theme, also won the people's choice award.

"In the 16 years, we have never had someone win twice," reports **Melanie Koch**, the Red Cross' special events officer. "Ever!!"

Event co-chairs were **Karol Bullard** and **Mary Critchfield**; the Tampa Bay Rays' **Dick Crippen** was master of ceremonies; and deejay **Rob Vollmar** kept the group energy level in high gear.

Judges included **Jen Holloway** of Bright House Networks; **Barry Spaulding**, executive chef at Salt Rock Grill; and **Stephanie Burkhart** and **Cindy Lew** from the Don.

### 12.13.10

**Marko Mavrovich**, an artist who has roots in Croatia, gave an art presentation to participants in the Family Resources Youth Arts Corps program, stressing the discipline of continual practice and the need to become inspired every day through painting, preparing a canvas, even rearranging a work space.

Mavrovich, who is largely self-taught, specializes in beach and ocean scenes; he began a painting and had participants in the seminar finish it, then gave it as a donation to Family Resources, which will auction it next spring.

**Kimberly White** is the corps' program director; Mavrovich is represented by Park West Gallery in Southfield, Mich.

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