

EVENT REPORT 02.22.08 4:30 PM

Paula's Poker Party

Paula Deen kicked off the first night of the South Beach Wine and Food Festival with a casino bash and Southern-style comfort food.



Food Network devotees, celebrity chefs, and Miami V.I.P.s headed to the [Paris Theatre](#) on February 21 for some late-night gambling at Paula's Poker Party, hosted by Southern domestic queen Paula Deen, as part of the South Beach Wine and Food Festival. As guests arrived, they were given wristbands for the open bar-sponsored by Jim Beam Global-welcomed by two Vegas-style showgirls, and directed to the gaming tables. An estimated 1,000 guests attended the bash and rubbed elbows with the likes of Food Network notables Giada De Laurentiis and Guy Fieri.

Event planner Heidi Ladell had worked tirelessly since last July to pull together the big event. In addition to finding the right venue, laying out the gaming table arrangements, acquiring sponsors, and arranging catering, Ladell also had a slew of logistical aspects to consider, such as security for the stars in attendance and keeping the flow of the event running smoothly.

With their ticket purchases, guests received \$5,000 worth of funny-money casino chips to test their luck at blackjack, roulette, craps, and of course, poker. [The Mahogany Grille](#) served up a bevy of Southern comfort foods, including macaroni and cheese, St. Louis-style ribs, and country ham and biscuits. In addition, Katie Lee Joel and recent James Beard Award winners Matt and Ted Lee passed their favorite recipes to the staff at [A Joy Wallace Catering Production and Design Team](#) to prepare for the event.

Not including the numerous gaming tables, Ladell had a variety of entertainment for guests to enjoy. Throughout the night, black-and-white videos of the Rat Pack's Vegas performances were projected onto the big screen above the theater's stage. On the more outrageous side, renowned drag queen Elaine Lancaster and her friends entertained guests with their lip-synching, dancing, and showmanship.

In addition to winning poker chips, partygoers could also receive tickets to increase their chances of winning one of the following raffle prizes: a personal picture with Deen, a World Series of Poker Professional Gram Gift Set, a gourmet gift basket from Smithfield food, and a felt blackjack table signed by Deen.



Sponsors for the event were Harrah's Casino Tunica, Jim Beam Global, and Starbucks. –

- Channing Muller

Catering, Event Production, Flowers: [A Joy Wallace Catering Production & Design Team](#)

Catering: [The Mahogany Grille](#)

Event Management: [Southern Wine & Spirits of America](#)

Lighting, Power, Sound: [Everlast Productions](#)

PR: [Brustman-Carrino](#)

Rentals: [Panache: A Classic Party Rentals Company - Pompano](#) ★

Venue: [Paris Theatre](#)