

Last night, the CFI bid a fond farewell to former executive director Ronda Clark, and gave a hearty welcome to Mary Nally, the new executive director. Held at the Athens Community Center, the Annual CFI Potluck was a wonderful affair, with lots of delicious food, wise words, and so much more.



The Bob Stewart Band

When I arrived, the Bob Stewart Band was just getting down to business. As folks trickled, then poured, in, the band filled the room with wonderful, upbeat music, setting the stage for a great evening. In my usual preferring-to-see-than-be-seen way, I headed to the back. It afforded me a good look at the incredible cross section of the Athens area that came for the celebration: farmers, educators, students, townies — all united by a passionate love for feeding our fellows with delicious

healthy food.

Speaking of delicious, healthy food, there was a great deal of it to be had. Salad, dip, soup, pasta, cornbread, chili, and dessert — the choices were almost bewildering, and a tremendous showcase of local ingredients. (I was particularly happy to see several dishes highlighting ramps. Mmmmm, ramps.)

It was obvious folks enjoyed the food, as there were quite a few serving dishes scraped clean by the end of the night. But I'm getting ahead of myself.



Athens is delicious



Next up, came the speakers. At this point, I realized that I had gotten everything backwards: what had seemed the back of the room was, in fact, the front. This worked out well, however, as it afforded me (and my camera) a great view of the proceedings.



The colors of real food

First to speak was the inimitable Leslie Schaller, who reminded us that the CFI was turning twenty this month. She thanked

Ronda for her eight years of hard work as the executive director for the CFI, specifically praising her for her, "fierce commitment to food justice for all." She also reassured us that Ronda wasn't exactly going into quiet retirement. In addition to growing and selling produce at the Athens Farmers Market and beyond from her Blackberry Sage Farm, Ronda is now on the AFM board where, Leslie noted wryly, "the ruckus has already started."



A word from our founder



Ruckuser-in-Chief

Amid laughter and applause, Ronda took the mic from Leslie. Ronda looked back on the eight years she served as the director of the CFI, nurturing it, "from a small fledgeling organization, to a large fledgeling organization." Reminding us that food security is a local issue, she was particularly proud that, "community gardening is now a household word." In addition to growing and selling heirloom beans, vegetables, and fruits, Blackberry Sage Farm was also doing seed saving, one of Ronda's particular passions.

Ronda introduced the new executive director, Mary Nally, saying, "After a few years with Mary, there will be fewer lawns and more gardens." She praised Mary's work with the Health Department, noting that her experience building cooperation between various groups, from citizens to politicians, will be a tremendous asset to the CFI.

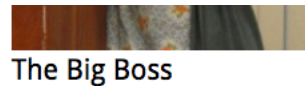
After taking the podium, Mary shared her story, helping us to get to know her better. A Meigs county native, Mary grew up, she said, "a typical hippie commune girl." Although she lived on the west coast for a while, she said that it was exactly the generational poverty which causes so many to leave our region which drew her back. "We are saving ourselves," she said, by creating a self sufficient community. "Membership in the CFI means that one feels a greater sense of community."



The Big Boss

After the applause settled down, all present voted on the CFI

After the applause settled down, all present voted on the CFI Board of Directors. In addition to re-electing those board members eligible, two at-large board members were also elected: Charlene King of King Family Farms and local chef, blogger, and documentary filmmaker Barbara Fisher. (Complete disclosure: Barbara is also my wife. And, no, I didn't nominate her; the results were as much a surprise to me as to her. But now I am happy she will finally be working on the CFI recipe book we've been after her to write!)



The Big Boss



Paul spins his stories

After the Board election, keynote speaker Paul Linscott spoke to us about life changes. Born in Athens in 1950, he quipped that he'd needed a bulldozer to come home from Sheltering Arms Hospital because the snow was so deep. "We don't get snow like that anymore," he observed. "That's a pretty big change in our lives." Addicted to cigarette smoke early — "it wasn't just fuzz on the TV we all sat around, it was smoke" — Paul smoked for 30 years, finally quitting in 1996. When he began gaining weight in 2002, Well Works started offering spinning classes, where he could exercise on a stationary bike. "I got addicted to that, too," he said. Now he teaches spinning classes at Well Works.

A longtime employee at our local Kroger, he contrasted the typical, conventional processed foods sold at the supermarket with the ever-expanding roster of local and organic foods also available there. "You voted," he said, "by what you bought, and we set an example for Ohio and the world."

After he retired from Kroger, Paul gained an enjoyment in farming — even weeding — that he hadn't had when he was a boy. Now he has a thousand raspberry bushes, and is planning on having a self-pick stand called Poppy's Raspberry Patch.



Enjoying the goodness

His final message was to remind us that one of the best things we can do is to get folks to eat healthy and work out.

After Paul was finished, Badger Johnson, Milena Miller and Nick Welch spoke about the importance and value of volunteering, and singled out a few of the CFI volunteers for special recognition. The most stirring moment came when Nick praised Donation

Station volunteer Doris Stewart for the hours and hours of work, in rain, snow and heat, that she has selflessly shared with the CFI.



Finally, there was a drawing for a beautiful quilt donated to the CFI by the wonderful women at Kilvert Community Center. Congratulations to Dave Hooker, the winner of the raffle. Then the lovely floral centerpieces, donated by the Hyacinth Bean, were also raffled off. I was happy to win one!



The evening drew to a close as folks pitched in to clean up and do dishes. I was delighted to discover that just enough of Barbara's pork & green chile white bean stew was left over for me to have a delicious midnight snack.

Thanks to everyone who attended, spoke, brought a dish, cleaned a cup (or twelve!) and helped make the "community" in Community Food Initiatives.