



The first event of the “**Fellows of the Skillet & Glass**” took place on May 22, 2023 and by all measures was a **GRAND SUCCESS!**

The players in the competition were two amateur cooking teams who were given the charge to cook a meal in a 34 inch paella pan to include protein(s), starch(es), and vegetable(s).

The **teams** competing were **Johnny Smith** (captain) with **Kelly Burleson** vs **Chris Morabito** (captain) with **Chad Kessler**.

First, many thanks to those who volunteered to be **judges**—many at the last minute: **Kyle Roblee, Moe Hinson, Montae Monroe, Dan Clinton, and Marshall Vann**. Due to a judging glitch, that was on me for poor communication, the match was declared a tie. We learned something from this, and this will not happen again, but it was fitting for this inaugural event. Next time we will have the winners who will be the Skillet smash the losers who will be the Glass. **Smash Down!**

The Morabito/Kessler team cooked a **seafood paella** with a variety of seafood including calamari, clams, cobia, flounder, shrimp and prawns. It was a beautiful and tasty savory dish. As the team was preparing the dish **Juan Sandoval**—from Valencia, Spain where the paella originated—gave us a talk on the history and nuances of the paella...very educational and entertaining. Thanks Juan!

Because the Smith/Burleson teams dish was spicy, they were given second service. Johnny created this dish himself and it grew from the idea that a “low country boil” could be cooked in a paella pan by roasting, frying or sautéing the typical ingredients in a low country boil—potatoes, corn, sausages, shrimp—and adding asparagus and pickled okra for the veggies. All of the ingredients were cut in bite sized pieces and the corn was cut out of the cob. This was a tasty, spicy and very creative dish that Johnny has often referred to as a “Low Country Sauté.”

As the dishes were being prepared, **Chris Nelson**, winemaker for Raffaldini Vineyards in Ronda, North Carolina, gave a wine assessment demonstration using a red wine from a **very generous donation of wines to the event by Jay Raffaldini**. I think everyone at the event came up to me and expressed how interesting and entertaining they found his presentation. They couldn’t help but find it educational also. Chris has an undergraduate degree in chemistry from Vanderbilt where he and his twin brother Mat won scholarships. Plus, he has master’s degrees from Fresno State in both viticulture and enology. Did I get it right this time Chris? Thanks for the demonstration!

Of course, guys like a good **dessert**, and **Chris Morabito** spent some time doing tableside Bananas Foster during his years at Clemson University. Now he didn’t use your typical rum to flame this popular dessert, he used a nearly 120 proof Balcones “Rumble” made with turbinado sugar and honey. We all enjoy seeing any dish flambeed, but the 120 Rumble made the flambe even more enjoyable. Thanks Chris for such an entertaining and delicious treat.

That’s a pretty good synopsis of the event but I would be remiss if I didn’t mention the **crème de la crème** of the event and that was our attending members. It would be impossible for me to bring words that would adequately describe the friendship and camaraderie that we all shared that evening, but I can toast to them all. **Salute!**