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Afternoon delight for a good cause

By Sarah Rohrs/Times-Herald staff writer

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Master cake decorator Tracy Wirta with the Contra Costa County Cake and Sugar Arts Society puts the finishing touches on a cake. (Chris Riley/Times-Herald)

At a time when money is tight for many, nearly 600 people came out Sunday afternoon in sweltering heat to give financially to the Contra Costa and Solano Food Bank.

The ninth annual "Afternoon in the Admiral's Garden" at the Admiral's and Captain's mansions on Mare Island featured gourmet food, live music, auctions and grand prize drawings.

The high heat did not detract from the fundraiser, which may bring in \$100,000, agency executive director Larry Sly said.

"You're making a difference to those in need. Thank you so much," Sly told the crowd assembled on the grassy, shaded lawns. The food bank has seen a 30 percent jump in demand during the last two years.

Food bank volunteer manager Sharon Zeppego said she was heartened to see so many people on hand, especially in the recession. "People get it. They know there's a big need," she said.

Volunteers at St. Mark's Lutheran Church in Fairfield are some who see the need first hand and so sponsored a table to help out. Saturday, volunteers gave out 135 bags of groceries at the food bank's pantry inside St. Marks, church council president June Johnsen said.

Food was celebrated throughout the afternoon. At one booth, food writer Susie Iventosch served her own recipe of crepes with white cheddar and caramelized apples and onions. "This is a blast. The day is beautiful. It's wonderful," she said.

Yau-Man Chan of Martinez, star of the 2007 "Survivor: Fiji" television show served mimosas with peach juice and champagne at the Trader Joe's table. He said he enjoys lending a hand.

Chan, who works at University of California at Berkeley in computers for the college of chemistry, lost 15 pounds while on the show eating mainly coconuts and raw sea snails. He placed fourth out of 20 contestants on the show in which competitors use their survival skills to try to win \$1 million.

As she competed for gift baskets in the silent auction, Sue Flood of Walnut Creek said she gives to the food bank all year to help assure people in need have something to eat.

"I can't imagine, in our country of so much, that anybody at all would go to bed hungry. That's unacceptable. There's no excuse," Flood said.

For more details go to www.foodbankccs.org or call 800-870-FOOD.

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