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From celebs to cheesecake on a stick

Trade show attracts 12,000 visitors

By **RITA DEMONTIS, SUN MEDIA**

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They came and ate and ate and -- ate!

By all accounts, the recent three-day Canadian Food and Beverage Show (CRFA) and Host -Ex event at Toronto's Direct Energy Centre proved an astounding success.

Billed as Canada's largest hospitality event, it brought together some of Canada's top culinary talent and featured more than 1,700 exhibit booths representing 700 of Canada's most innovative food, beverage, equipment and service providers.

Hundreds of new products -- from trans fat-free oils and exotic chocolate to eco-friendly cleaners and compostable take-out containers -- made their debut at this year's show, which attracted nearly 12,000 industry professionals.

There was so much to see and eat and do, from the talented chefs and food and wine personalities on board -- a veritable who's who of the food world -- to the new and innovative items coming our way via the supermarket shelves, grocery stores and restaurants.



Lucy and Joe Lopez of Fortunati Foods show off their new Original Cheesecake Bliss On A Stick. (Dave Thomas/SUN MEDIA)

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The celebrities included Jason Bangerter, Massimo Capra, Lynn Crawford (who continues to wow the crowds at the Four Seasons Hotel in New York City), Christine Cushing (who was also on hand to talk about her line of new tomato sauces as well as her famous olive oil), Donna Doher, Mark McEwan, Jason Rosso, Michael Stadlander and Zoltan Szabo, to name just a few.



We couldn't believe the array of new foods coming to a table near you. Crowds were three deep at the booth, where hand-dipped chocolate-covered cheesecakes in an array of flavours were on hand.

"The response has been phenomenal," said Joe Lopez of Fortunati Foods. He and wife Lucy are the names behind the sweet treats.

"It's a great way to serve a favourite dessert. And from the response we've been receiving, it's all good."

For more info, check blissonastick.com.

Over at the Siena Foods booth, lean and omega-3 were the busy buzzwords for the array of traditional Italian cold cuts that will be coming our way.

"We used the show to launch the family of new omega-3 items, that are also low in fat, sodium and carry the health check label," said show organizers.

They were also celebrating the 48th anniversary of Siena, a company proudly run and operated by the DeLuca family.

In fact, Siena prides its success and longevity on being a producer of quality and innovative products.

Everywhere we turned we found amazing items. Italian gelato was everywhere, and we sampled the most intense flavours ever created.

One company, Prodotti Stella (winners of the Gelato World cup 2008), had one of the most colourful -- and delicious! -- booths.

A few aisles down, we puckered up for the joys of Mrs. Whyte's Original Brine pickles (whytes.ca) and her new line of salad dressings.

Nature's Path was on hand to offer up its new organic line of "Optimum Power" breakfast cereal, while we noticed an abundance of organics in everything from breads to mains to desserts.

The CRFA Show is a trade-only event owned and operated by the Canadian Restaurant and Foodservices Association.

CRFA is Canada's largest hospitality association with 33,000 members representing chain and independent restaurants, hotels, caterers, bars, institutions and



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"The Canadian foodservice industry was hungry for an event that would bring together food service suppliers and buyers in a dynamic new setting, and we're pleased to say that this year's CRFA Show delivered," said Steve Barber, CRFA vice-president of expositions.

"This new show debuted with unprecedented industry support and strong attendance, due in large part to the great lineup of demonstrations and seminars that took place each day," said Barber.

"We're confident that we've raised the bar for food service events in Canada and we're looking forward to an even greater event next year."

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