

# Refining the palate at Stills in the Hills



PHOTOS BY DAVE GIBSON

### Spirits with spirit

Above, left; Michael Hazel of Gold Dirt Distillery was there all the way from Rollinsville. Above, right; Rising Sun Distillery's mixtures are interesting and tasty. Upper middle, right; Jimmy Lewis kept VIPs entertained. Lower middle, right; Rachel and Justin Schaffer's Coyote Gold margaritas were a popular choice. Bottom, right; Roxanne Fuller (left) and Brenda Hunsaker (right) of Well Hung Meats offered delicious jerky.

### Dave Gibson Central City

Central City's 150-year-old historic building-lined cobblestone Main Street, was once again the ideal setting for the annual Stills in the Hills, Saturday, June 25. Dozens of Colorado craft distilleries offered hundreds of varieties of potent potables for the sampling.

Well Hung Meats Company was worth a stop before entering the main area where unlimited spirit tasting was available with a \$45 ticket. Lil' Woody's Honey BBQ Seasoned Beef Sticks, Hot & Spicy Jerky, Teriyaki Jerky, and staying true to the festival's theme, Smokey Bourbon Jerky was most delicious and for sale.

Given a handsome miniature-size glass keepsake mug, attendees went about trying some of the myriad of choices. Impossible to sample them all, it was wise to be judicious with the options spread over time lest becoming too snookered. It reminded me of when Richie Cunningham of the TV show "Happy Days" was dealing with a hangover and told his dad that all he drank the night before was "beer in teeny-weeny glasses." "How many teeny-weeny glasses did you have," his dad asked. "Seventy-two."

A logical place to start was at Coyote Gold's tent for some 37 proof margaritas. Made in Fort Collins, they use only natural ingredients with no preservatives. All their formulas, chilled on ice, were refreshing – the original formula, jalapeño, pineapple coconut, or a special grapefruit mixture.

I believe I had three one-ounce pineapple coconut margaritas and one grapefruit margarita over the course of the afternoon. In search of something stiffer, but not quite ready for the hard stuff, I settled upon the booth of CoVodkaCo where spiked chocolate milk shots were

being served. Next to their tent was the VIP area that included food and the stylings of local favorite The Jimmy Lewis Band. Sitting at tables grooving to Lewis' rendition of The Band's "The Weight," it was a relaxing spot to "Take a load off Fanny."

Old Elk Distillery offered their 88 proof Blended Straight Bourbon Whiskey which won Best Colorado Whiskey at the International Whiskey Competition in 2020. The difference between whiskey and bourbon whiskey is that bourbon must be made of at least 51% corn which gives it an agreeably distinct sweet taste. It also has to be aged for at least two years in new charred oak barrels. Old Elk's Blood Orange Whiskey, which was named the Best Flavored Whiskey of the Year in 2022 at the World Whiskey Awards, went down smooth. If there were a category for best bottle cap, they would win hands down with their unmistakable bugling elk head.

It was interesting learning from the distillers about what went into their libations and fun comparing impressions of what was sampled with other guests. Gold Dirt Distillery from Rollinsville renders four fine-quality gins, one vodka, and a brandy. Each bottle's label is adorned with an elk, bobcat, fox, or hornet. Spirit Hound Distillers of Lyons has won a dozen awards for their whiskeys, rums, gins, and liqueurs. Rising Sun Distillery's Colorado Peach Brandy is carefully crafted with fresh Palisade peaches. Lavender grown on the Western Slope blends favorably with hibiscus flower and honey in their Gold Medal-winning Lavender Hibiscus Liqueur that immerses the palate in an aromatic fruity flavor.

Before considering myself a true connoisseur, I'll need to attend Stills in the Hills again next year to conduct more research.

