

SWEET SUCCESS



MELISSA PHILLIP : CHRONICLE

TASTE TEST: Thuy Nguyen, left, of Katy, and Jenny Luu and Anna Ng, both of Houston, sample food and drink items Sunday during The Metropolitan Cooking & Entertaining Show at Reliant Center. Thousands turned out for the weekend event.

Cooking up a successful show

■ Event devoted to entertaining with flair draws in thousands

By **HALLIE JORDAN**
HOUSTON CHRONICLE

Specialty food vendors filled Reliant Center this weekend with everything from pistachio-flavored salsa to wine cocktail mixes.

About 10,000 people turned out for the Houston premiere of the Metropolitan Cooking & Entertaining Show, a weekend event that's also held in Washington, D.C. and Atlanta. Dozens of food vendors from around the state provided samples of their grub to the crowds, many of whom came to see Food Network star Paula Deen.

"It was overwhelmingly and incredibly successful," CEO and Founder Denise Medved said. "Houston far surpassed anything in D.C. or Atlanta for the first year. Many of the vendors sold out, some even by 10 a.m."

Dread Head Chef Michael Weinstein (complete with dreadlocks) said he wanted to bring the desert chips he created in Fort Worth to a larger market.

"It's an opportunity to present our product to a new audience and a wide range of people," he said.

The idea for sweet chips came about from an accident while making tacos one night. He now serves cinnamon and sugar chips with strawberry mango salsa.

Another vendor, selling a "wine-based cocktail" called Wine-A-Rita, said Houston is a perfect location for selling a cold drink, made from a powder mixed with any wine, because of

the hot weather.

"This is a great opportunity, and we've heard about the show for years," co-owner Judy Smith said.

Claire Speck, another attendee, enjoyed the event.

"It is absolutely what I was expecting," said Speck, of Friendswood. "The prices are good, too."

Others left hungry for more food and cooking demonstrations.

"I thought it would be bigger and have more people from local businesses and restaurants," said attendee Trina Thornton, of the Willowbrook area. "Also, there was not enough cooking."

hallie.jordan@chron.com