

Theatrical tacos: Bethalto eating contest encourages showmanship

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
May 21 2016 4:22 PM



BETHALTO - Ten tacos in four minutes is a daunting challenge few can muster.

However, eight men ventured to attempt such a feat at the fourth annual taco eating contest at the **Bethalto Jaycees** Fair Saturday afternoon. The contest is hosted by **T-Mo's Tacos**, a food truck specializing in tacos managed by **Todd Morales**. Other

sponsors included **Airline Pawn**, **Shelter Insurance** and **Horton's Auto and Outdoor Repair**. Contestants were given 10 tacos from T-Mo's, and a countdown of four minutes.

"We try to have a good time," Morales said. "Everybody gets excited and some people have costumes. Each one has their own theme song too."

Saturday's winner, **James Wehl** of Belleville was already the reigning champion. He won last year's contest as well. He searches for local gastronomic challenges on the internet. Of his recent challenges, including devouring a Granite City burger weighing three pounds in 30 minutes, Wehl said the taco eating contest is the only competitive one.

"It's the only one I do against other people," he said. "I get a trophy, a t-shirt, a cash prize and a free full belly."

This year, after consuming all 10 tacos, Wehl was awarded \$200, a Cricket cell phone and a free oil change from Horton's.



Second place finisher **Jeff "The Highlander" Keffer** won two years in a row previous to Weihl's entrance on the scene. He entered the contest in a kilt with a bearskin draped about his shoulders. He said he used to dawn face paint for the event as well.

"See, when you get all that taco grease involved with the face paint, a lot of it goes into your mouth," he said.

The Highlander ate a bit more than nine tacos this year, which he has accomplished each time he's entered the challenge. He originally hailed from Alton, but has since moved to Collinsville.



Last year's third place, and this year's fourth place contestant, **Dawson Brown**, also decided to go into costume. He dressed like Jack Black's character from *School of Rock*, and entered to AC/DC. He said he entered because his mother asked him to, and he enjoyed the work of the Jaycees, who help the community of Bethalto.

Morales said he was grateful for the blessing of good weather this year, saying previous years have included rain, storms, and a blown-over tent. The tent blew over again this year, but only temporarily.

