

Greek Fest offers food, fun and festivities

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Stephanie Kalina-Metzger, For The Sentinel

From left to right, Mary Touloumes, Sophie Nicholas and Marian Rolles have been volunteering at Greek Fest for decades. The trio prepared food the week before the 2015 festival.

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WORMLEYSBURG — For weeks now it's been "all hands on deck" at the Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church as an army of volunteers busy themselves preparing for the annual Greek Fest to be held at the Wormleysburg church from Friday to Sunday.

Most volunteers return year after year. Betsy Boutselis of Mechanicsburg was not alone in saying she enjoys the socialization the most. Jim Lloyd, also of Mechanicsburg, said it was a tradition for his mother-in-law and when he retired, he decided to volunteer.

"I like to help the ladies do the manual work," he said.

Last week's project was the ethereal baklava. Hands flew as the volunteers worked, painting butter on the layers upon layers of finicky filo before it dried out.

"You gotta work quickly," said Nick Mallios of Newville.

And Mallios knows his baklava. The former owner of Sunnyside Restaurant, where festival food was once prepared back when the event was smaller, said "Baklava is a middle eastern type dessert, originally done in the Ottoman Empire and developed by the Turks. Different countries use nuts native to their region. Our baklava is a blend of almonds and walnuts, orange extract, cinnamon, honey, sugar and butter."

To make shorter work of the labor-intensive project, the church had a special implement crafted to cut even pieces of baklava. Just a few years ago, coordinators hatched a plan to use up the previously unused corners and ends of the baklava to make the now popular baklava sundae.

"We grind them up and then add syrup and use it for the topping," Mallios said.

Baklava is just one of the many baked goods available during the three-day festival that started in the early 1900s and attracts an estimated 30,000 people.

Dinners include chicken done Greek style and roasted lamb shank, which is a festival favorite. Also available are Greek specialties like moussaka, a savory dish comprised of layers of eggplant and seasoned sirloin and topped with béchamel and pastitsio, which is similar, with macaroni substituting for the eggplant. Greek salad, Greek meatballs, called keftedes, and spinach pie, also known as spanakopita, are also popular items.

Many folks from around the region mark opening day on their calendars and make a yearly pilgrimage to the event for lunch. On Friday, lines begin to form early, especially at the Souvlaki stand, so time your visit wisely.

This year's entertainment will once again be provided by the "Olympic Flame Dancers," who don colorful costumes and perform traditional dances in front of the cathedral. After the show, guests can browse the gift shops filled with a variety of handcrafted items like jewelry, accessories and ceramics.

If you're hard-pressed to wait an entire year to get your fix of the many Greek specialties offered at the event, you can master your own. New this year is a cookbook coordinated by Philoptochos President Constance Dina Keriazes.

"All 100 recipes from the festival will be in there," Keriazes said.

Philoptochos, meaning "friends of the poor," is the philanthropic group that uses festival proceeds to make charitable contributions. Money received by the group goes to both national and local groups like Bethesda Mission, New Hope Ministry, the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank and Harrisburg Daily Bread.

The always enthusiastic Dimitri Kouzios, longtime volunteer and past coordinator of Greek Fest, said, "We want people to get their Greek on. It's a cultural celebration that is ideal for the entire family, and we serve the greatest food this side of Athens."

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