

COMMUNITY

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Pierogi Power

St. Andrew staple remains just as popular as ever



Longtime pierogi maker Nick Jankovich of Lyndora, left, sits with George Lorino of New York who pitched in to help pinch pierogies. Lorino took 25 dozen back with him. St. Andrew's pierogies have been shipped to Ohio, Florida, Arizona and California. SUBMITTED PHOTO

By Eric Freehling
Eagle Community Editor

LYNDORA — It arrives with the change of the season in October: the leaves start coming down and the pierogies start flowing out of St. Andrew Orthodox Church, 201 Penn Ave.

"It's been getting bigger and bigger," said Kathy Jankovich, a church member involved in the pierogi production.

She said St. Andrew makes and sells pierogies for takeout in October, November and December and again in February, March and April.

"It's once a month generally on the second or third Tuesday, depending on the church calendar," said Jankovich.

Jankovich said, "My mother-in-law, Helen Jankovich, drafted me about nine years ago around Christmas time. They needed help pinching."

Helen Jankovich, 93, still turns out to make pierogies. Kathy Jankovich said she worked her way up the ranks of peeler, masher, pincher and boxer.

"We started selling pierogies about 40 years ago," Jankovich said. "Of course, then we got 75 cents a dozen. Today it's \$7.50 a dozen."

Actually, pierogies go back longer than that. Pierogies appeared in the United States in the early 1900s when thousands of eastern Europeans immigrated here. By the 1940s, pierogi became a staple for church fundraisers.

St. Andrew continues in that tradition today. The proceeds of the pierogi sale go to the church.

"It goes to the sisterhood fund," said Jankovich. "But then we donate it to the church to use as needed. The money is used for repairs and to buy new altar clothes."

Making the pierogies for sale is a three-day affair involving 25 to 30 people.

It begins Wednesdays in the church kitchen in St. Andrew's basement. Dozens of onions are peeled, chopped and sautéed, and hundreds of pounds of potatoes are peeled, boiled and then mashed.

On Thursday, the cheese-and-potato filling is made and rolled into balls.

On Friday, the dough to cover the balls is made, and then the pinchers take over, covering the balls with dough and pinching it into the distinctive pierogi shape.

The pierogies are then transferred to pots to be boiled and then await pickup.

"We probably sell anywhere from 100 to 400 dozen at a time, except around Christmas when we can make 500 dozen," said Jankovich.

All the pierogies are pre-ordered, she added, and customers can have any filling they want as long as it is potato and cheese.

"We used to do sauer-

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Eve Minto

kraut filling, but you need too many people to make it," said Jankovich, so in the interest of streamlining operations, sauerkraut was kaput.

Practice makes perfect, according to Eve Minto, who's been on the pierogi assembly line for the last 15 years.

Minto said, "It takes about a minute to make a pierogi. But we have pinchers who are exceptionally good. One lady, she can knock off four in a minute."

Everybody has a designated job on Friday. Some make circles out of the dough which is then passed to those who drop the filling into the dough and pinch the dough around it in the traditional crescent shape.

Workers then take the raw pierogies in trays to pots of boiling water to cook, a process that takes two to three minutes. Others then put the cooked pierogies into takeout containers and bag them up to await the buyers to come to the church.

Volunteer Rick Daller said, "Pinchers have the best time. They sit and talk, and we're cutting circles over and over. And they keep saying 'More dough, more dough.'"

It makes for a long day. Volunteers start arriving around 6 a.m. the Fridays of a sale.

"By 2 p.m., depending on how many orders are left, we will start washing dishes and cleaning the hall," Jankovich said.

Volunteer and lifelong St. Andrew's member Dorothy Hays said she doesn't mind the long day.

"It's actually more like a fellowship," Hays said. "Eighteen of the volunteers are non-Orthodox. They love it."

"We have a nice lunch when we're done pinching," Hays added.

Jankovich said a typical sale can go through 130 to 175 pounds of potatoes, 50 to 75 pounds of onions and 30 to 35 pounds of flour.

The potatoes have to be russet — considered perfect for mashing — and the flour has to be Robin Hood brand, said Jankovich, praising its good quality.

But the names of other ingredients will never leave St. Andrew's basement.

"Certain things we will not reveal," she said.

"Some will donate the potatoes, the onions, the eggs. The biggest expense we have will be the containers," Jankovich said.



Helen Jankovich, 93, at left, still takes her turn on the pierogi assembly line. She said the church began the pierogi sale 40 years ago. Since the 1940s, the pierogi has been a staple for church fundraisers nationwide. SUBMITTED PHOTO

The first St. Andrew pierogi sale is set for Oct. 19, and the doughy delicacies can travel for beyond the borders of Butler County.

St. Andrew has shipped pierogies to Ohio, Florida, Arizona and California.

Jankovich said of one distant customer. "She won't eat the last dozen she has until she has another dozen."

"Some customers order them raw and do what they want with them. One customer used to French fry them," she added.

Jankovich said, "The demand for pierogies is fairly consistent. If anything, it has increased."

"It's a lot of work, and people don't want to do it," she said, explaining why the church pierogies are such big sellers.

That's echoed nationwide. Food industry observers say Americans consume more than 31 million pierogies yearly.

And, Oct. 8 is National Pierogi Day. And during baseball season fans can enjoy the Pittsburgh Pirates' "pierogi races" that are staged at every home game.



Pots are lined up in the basement of St. Andrew Orthodox Church in Lyndora for the final step in pierogi making, boiling the potato-filled dumplings. The workers at St. Andrew need three days to make the pierogies for their monthly sales. SUBMITTED PHOTO