

A cherished tradition: St. Boniface archives open during annual dinner

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By Sharon Barnes in **OurTown**, Stayton, Sublimity, Aumsville, Lyons & Mehama

The annual St. Boniface parish dinner is a tradition rooted in the community.

Recollections differ about the exact year the first parish dinner took place, but long-time Sublimity area resident Tony Beitel, who celebrated his 101st birthday this year, believes the tradition began in 1918 when he was still a young boy.

Rita Young and other members of the St. Boniface Archives & Museum credit The Rev. Anthony Lainck for starting the annual dinner.

Pastor of St. Boniface from 1895 to 1927, Lainck was noted for a kindness and sociability that won him a host of friends in Sublimity and Stayton, among Catholics and non-Catholics alike.

St. Boniface's BBQ Chicken Dinner
Sunday, Oct. 10, 11 a.m. - 3 p.m.
Sublimity Middle School cafeteria
431 E. Main St.
Quarter chicken, green beans,
baked potatoes, chicken noodles,
fresh dinner rolls, pies, cake, desserts -
even ice cream, coffee, juice.
Raffles, games and a country store.
Adults: \$9.50, 6-12: \$4.50, under 5: free
Take out dinners begin at noon:
\$10, half a chicken: \$5.
Dinner for homebound: \$9.50.
Call Dolores Gries,
503-769-9372, for delivery.

The St. Boniface Archives & Museum will host an Open House in the Convent Building. Visitors can view historical artifacts and see where local family histories are preserved and catalogued.

Lainck, for whom Anthony Hall is named, came up with the idea of an end-of-harvest dinner as a way for both his parishioners and members of the local communities to come together to get better acquainted.

In the early years the St. Boniface dinner was "pot luck." Bowls and platters of a family's favorite recipe were laid out on white tablecloths in the "Old School" building, which was converted into a community social center and kitchen when the new school was built in 1913.

Joe Spenner, now 89, was only 7 years old when he first helped split armloads of kindling for the wood-fired cookstoves, keeping enough water boiling to scald dozens of freshly killed chickens before they were plucked and prepared for cooking. In the 1930s, the annual parish dinner became known as a Dinner and Bazaar.

Instead of pot luck, The Rev. Joseph Scherbring asked the Altar Society women to plan and cook the dinners, while other parishioners took charge of quilt and craft raffles, a "fish pond" for children and games.

The wheel of chance drew the biggest crowd. Peter "Red Pete" Etzel spun the big numbered wheel and awarded a prize to whoever held a paddle with the corresponding number. In the 1940s, the

parish dinner was moved to the basement of the newly built St. Boniface hall and gymnasium.

Over the years, roast turkey and fried chicken were served most often, although organizers sometimes varied the menu with roast beef, rolled turkey or homemade sausage and sauerkraut.

In the early 1970s, Hank and Evelyn Miotke settled on a winning recipe for marinated, deep-fried chicken, which remained the favorite for 20 years.

Three generations of Miotkes helped season and cook the chicken, starting at 5 in the morning the day of the dinner and working until 11:30 a.m. when the second crew came on. Herman and Darlene Hendricks headed up the second crew. There was always a friendly competition between the two families to see who could prepare the most tubs of the winning-recipe chicken.

In the mid-90s, with barbecue becoming a popular choice at many other parish dinners, St. Boniface hit on a new favorite, thanks to pitmaster Tim Bielenberg, his brothers and crew. With years of experience at the grill, the Bielenbergs serve up tender quarter-chickens, seasoned to perfection with their "secret recipe."

Times have changed over the past 92 years, but much about the St. Boniface parish dinner remains deliciously the same. The Van Handle sisters were well known for their homemade chicken and noodles, and the recipe they perfected has passed down through the generations.

The sisters taught Julie Balderston and others how to make this classic dish, ensuring that it continues to be a notable part of the event.

Situated in the heart of "green bean country," St. Boniface has always included green beans as a traditional parish dinner staple, along with baked potatoes, fresh dinner rolls and generous portions of homemade cakes, pies and desserts.

As chairman of this year's parish dinner, Raymond Heuberger is quick to give much of the credit to Paul and Mary Ann Denman, and to all of the volunteers, committees and donors who step up to help.

Echoing Father Lainck's sociable spirit, Heuberger said he hopes everyone in the surrounding communities, whether Catholic or not, will come enjoy a great meal and perhaps get a little better acquainted in the process.

ST. BONIFACE SERVES THE MASSES, Stayton Mail, Oct. 11. 2006

ANNUAL CHICKEN DINNER DRAWS A CROWD
By Kathleen Ellyn

The line began outside the middle school gym in Sublimity and snaked down the steps into the basement cafeteria. It followed along the wall and around two corners before it finally reached the kitchen window.

By noon Sunday, the line was already 75 people deep and the dining room is already crowded with more than 200 diners. The line moved smoothly and quickly, even though nobody was really in a hurry – the din from neighbors visiting with neighbors was both loud and pleasant.

By 3 p.m. the St. Boniface annual Chicken Dinner will have been served to somewhere around 2,000 folks, everyone will be caught up on what's going on in Sublimity, and close to \$10,000 will have been raised for parish projects, organizers said.

Though a lot of people at the dinner are Catholic, you don't have to be to enjoy the famous St. Boniface Chicken Dinner, said Kim Zuber, parish secretary and dinner organizer.

"They come for the chicken and the chicken noodle," she said. "It's a Sublimity tradition."

Outside at the take-out window Lina Ziogas of Salem was collecting some dinners for later.

"I was raised out here," Ziogas said, and she couldn't have missed the dinner. "Half my relatives are out there preparing the chicken," she said.

She gestured to the three big pits in back of the school building where chief chef Ed Bielenberg and his helpers, Steve Zuber of Sublimity and Pat Blair of Keizer were walking briskly up and down making sure the chicken was barbecued just right. Ed is the youngest of the Bielenberg brothers, famous for their chicken. Nearby, big brother Tim was preparing the birds for the grill.

Ed and his assistants walked miles Sunday, up and down those fire pits, because the secret – or at least one of them anyway – to St. Boniface famous chicken is "keep them turned so they don't get burnt," Ed said. They flip the big racks of chicken every few minutes.

Another secret was to keep the birds basted in butter.
But the boys weren't telling their final seasoning secret.

"Don't be fooled by these Lawry's Season Salt shakers," called Tim Bielenberg. "It's a decoy – there's a secret recipe in here."

Tim may or may not be kidding, but one thing is obvious: These Bielenberg boys know their barbecued bird. They've been honing their skills for nearly 20 years, Ed said. Approximately 10 years here at St. Boniface, but another nine years previous to that at the nearby Scotts Mills Fire-fighter Dinner that will be held Oct. 21.

"We're just practicing for the Scotts Mills Dinner," teases Diane Blair of Keizer.

While Diane's husband Pat patrols the fire pits, she and fellow workers Dan Heuberger of Sublimity, Joe Zuber of Sublimity, and Conrad Spenner of Sublimity are helping Tim Bielenberg prepare the 1,000 half-chickens for the pit.

Inside the cafeteria the chicken is divided into dark and light meat quarters and all of the "fixens" are added: green beans, baked potatoes, chicken noodles, fresh dinner rolls; desserts.

Diane Hall of Sublimity was sorting the desserts as fellow volunteers selected and cut them.

"There must be close to 150 desserts," she guessed. All were donated by church members.

Nearby Joe Hallam of Sublimity took tickets for take-out dinners. He was shooting the breeze with his cousin from Salem, Ken VanDriesch. Ken brought his Dad, Van, to the dinner as usual.

"Dad comes pretty much every year," VanDriesche said. "He's 93. He likes to go to all the dinners."

"Knowing Uncle Van, he'll be visiting," said Hallam.

Hallman was working the dinner because "I'm a participator," he admitted. "I'm involved and it's also fun and takes up my retirement time."

Sublimity's mayor Raymond Heuberger circulated through the diners, pouring coffee.

Upstairs in the gym, crafter's booths filled the floor, and kids' games of jingle-board, dime toss, and beanbag toss were set up around the edge.

Across the street in the basement of the convent historians gathered to look at the newly organized archives.

"The artifacts are being properly cataloged and preserved and family histories are being preserved," said Henry Strobel of Aumsville, the coordinator, of the historical commission in Sublimity.

"This is not just the history of Catholics," he said. "This the history of Sublimity."

One can learn, for instance, that the headmaster of the one-time Sublimity College was Bishop Wright, a member of the United Brethren and the father of the famous flying Wright brothers.

"Right here in Sublimity," Strobel said.

PARISH DINNER MEMORIES
By Margaret Hendricks, 2006

My earliest recollection goes back to about mid-1930s.

This parish event was started by Father Joe Scherbring who asked the Altar Society women to plan and cook the dinners.

Since they were held in the fall of the year turkey was usually the main course -chicken and noodles were also part of the menu.

I recall one year Fr. Scherbring asked the altar society to serve roast beef. Some of the women objected thinking it would be too much work, but they did give it a try. Unfortunately, it wasn't a favorite with parishioners so the next year they went back to turkey.

Around 1955, Fr. Neugebauer encouraged the ladies to do a rolled turkey meal which was quite successful, but required a lot of prep work.

Next they tried a delicious deep fried chicken dinner that was a real winner, and was used for the next 20 years. Fried chicken was eventually replaced by barbecue chicken, which had become popular at many of the other parish dinners in the area.

Throughout the years, the people of the parish have been asked to donate whatever is needed to make the dinner a success. Cakes and pies are brought in by our good home cooks for tempting desserts.

The first parish dinners were called Bazaars and dinner was served in the old High School building, which stood at the west end of the park, just across the fence from Mike and Judy Peletier.

The Bazaar included many games which were held in the old Forrester Hall that was located where Don and Marylynn Heuberger later built their home. The games included a wheel where paddles with numbers on them were sold. Then the wheel was spun and whoever held the lucky number paddle won a prize. This game was very popular, and drew a great crowd. They also had a fish pond for the children, and a jingle board, or ring toss for coins. Usually they had an item, such as a quilt or other craft, which was raffled as an added fund raiser.

Eventually the Bazaar name was dropped and it became the present Parish Dinner.

ST. BONIFACE ANNUAL CHICKEN DINNER
reported by Carol Rambousek 2006

The first dinners were called "Bazaar and Dinner"

Vera Boedigheimer has the records of when the schools were built. The dinners were held in the "Old School" built in 1888 (located on Main across from Welters, moved to the rear around 1913)

Joseph Spenner (grandfather to current Joe Spenner) helped build the "Old School."

When new school was built in 1913, the "Old School" became a social center and the home of the St. Boniface Annual Dinner.

Joe Spenner now 85, in about 1929 loaded the wood stove w/wood for the cooking of the dinners and remembers doing it at about age 7. He remembered big boiler pans on the stove where they cooked the chicken for chicken and noodles. The newly butchered chickens were prepared the day before. He said he wasn't sure

what year the dinners actually started, but there was conversation of the dinners as long as he could remember.

Joe remembers Chicken, Chicken and Noodles, mashed potatoes & gravy, green beans. Pies were apple, pumpkin and lemon.

Formal committee chairman came about in the early 50's.

Camilla Butler and Vera Russell remember a few years they tried homemade sausage and sauerkraut. Pete Etzel donated the pork for the homemade sausage.

Camilla Butler remembers, for a couple of years, beef wrapped in burlap and cooked under the ground. One of the Etzel's from Shaw helped members with the BBQ technique. This proved to be a lot of work but was good.

Delores and Bob Cramer remembered Mami Laux (Wayne & Marjorie's grandmother) prepare turkey. Her turkey and dressing was requested by many at their wedding dinners. The Cramers were married in 1948 and Mami prepared their dinner. In the late 40's, there was the turkey dinner and then a supper in the evening with the leftovers and dances upstairs at the "Old School."

Joe Spenner often did the setup where they carried the benches from upstairs for the dinner. This was in the 50's.

Delores Stuckart said green beans were served at every dinner she could remember. Delores said, "You know, this was green bean country throughout the valley." She remembered a game called the "wheel." Tickets were sold by the numbers on the wheel and then they would spin the wheel. Whatever number the wheel stopped at was the winner and a prize was won.

Early 1970s Hank and Evelyn Miotke changed the menu to deep fried the chicken. Three generations of family helped with cleaning, seasoning and marinating the chicken. The oil had to be just right and they used a coating dip. Cooking started at 5 am and lasted until about 11:30 am. Then, the second crew came: Herman & Darlene Hendricks. Many people bought the marinated chicken to go and also the final product. There was competition between the Miotke's to see how many tubs of chicken they could get done before the second Hendricks shift came on. It was a time the Miotke's looked forward to - the family had a great time. Dinner was served, as is now, in the Sublimity Middle School building in the basement.

Mami Laux perfected the chicken and noodle recipe - all homemade. She taught Darlene Hendricks. and Darlene then taught her daughters as well as Julie Balderston.

Current BBQ on the grill started about 15 years ago. Tim Bielenberg and crew perfected the current BBQ recipe.