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Home Cooking for the Holidays

By Susie Iventosch



Orinda Mayor Sue Severson, Lafayette Mayor Don Tatzin (middle), and Moraga Mayor Dave Trotter discuss the holidays in Severson's kitchen Photo Tod Fierner

ham dinner. Often, lucky friends and family are serenaded by Christmas carols as she delivers gifts of homemade fudge. On New Year's Day she prepares currant-glazed roast pork tenderloin, seasoned with mustard and thyme and accompanied by black-eyed peas and cabbage - in honor of her Irish heritage.

"My mother said that her Irish father always insisted on these vegetables on New Year's Day to ensure you had plenty of coins and green dollars in your pocket throughout the coming year," she said.

Moraga's Mayor Dave Trotter and his wife Debby have a few special holiday traditions they share with their children Andy, Emma, Jack and Patrick. Debby's mom, Ida, recently passed away at the age of 92, but her cookie recipe, which has been in the family for decades, lives on and is enjoyed by the entire family.

"Debby typically makes hundreds of these cookies every year," the Mayor said. "They are very tasty and rarely last more than a day when everyone is home for the holidays!"

Maxine's Holiday Punch, made with ginger-ale, lemon juice, orange juice and Grenadine syrup, is a refreshing and colorful non-alcoholic drink, served slightly frozen and a bit slushy.

"It has been a favorite of my mother Maxine for as long as I can remember," Trotter said. "These cookies and punch feature prominently in our home at Thanksgiving and Christmas time."

Other traditional fare at the Trotter household includes homemade cream of asparagus soup, rack of lamb in mustard sauce, and "Dave's Caesar Salad," along with a Moraga Pear Festival pie or berry pie from the Moraga Farmers' Market for dessert.

"I spend a lot of time in the kitchen on Christmas Day preparing dinner - with plenty of help from the family," he said. "In addition to listening to holiday music, as our four children have gotten older, we have traditionally spent time at the dinner table talking about the year past and all of the things and reasons for which we are thankful."

For some folks, chocolate is the ultimate answer to holiday culinary traditions and the City of Lafayette staff would not disagree. When I visited last week to inquire about Mayor Tatzin's award-winning truffles, they received rave reviews. This made me hungry and especially anxious to try them. The end result of my quest was a special delivery by the Mayor of two beautiful raspberry truffles neatly tucked into red foil wrappers!

"He always wraps them in different-colored foils and gives us each a different one," said Joanne Robbins, Lafayette City Clerk. "We are always looking to see who got what flavor! We do look forward to Mayor Tatzin's truffles."

The Tatzin truffle tradition started when a friend of Ellen Reintjes (the Mayor's wife) came to the Bay Area for a business trip in the winter of 1984. The friend, Jean, was accompanied by another business associate who knew how to make homemade truffles. Since both Ellen and Jean were self-admitted chocoholics, Jean coaxed her associate into giving a truffle-making tutorial on one particularly rainy evening. Ever since that drizzly night, the Mayor and his wife have made truffles to give away to family, friends, colleagues (and even one reporter!) at Christmas time. They also donate two boxes to the Lafayette Community Center holiday fair to raise funds for the center.

"We've experimented with different flavors and eventually entered our truffles in the Alameda County Fair from 2004 to 2008," Reintjes said. "We came upon our favorite recipes by trial and error! It is also important to note that the ideal temperature for the truffle work station area is 68 degrees Fahrenheit. If it is too warm, the truffle centers are difficult to handle."

The truffles are affectionately named "Mountaindog Truffles" in deference to the household dogs that are named after various

Holiday traditions are like dear old friends - you can always pick up right where you left off and never miss a beat. Whether it's decorating the house, baking cookies, spying on Santa, or adorning the tree with twinkling lights, families wrap the holidays with their own familiar customs.

Meals are an especially great time to rediscover old family favorites, whether it's a special cookie, a succulent roast or even a festive drink. This year we thought it might be fun to feature a few of those customary dishes that our local mayors have enjoyed with family and friends over the years.

Mayor Sue Severson of Orinda hails from the south, born and raised in Louisiana. Her family fare tends to reveal a Southern touch and one of the family's favorites is traditional Southern Pecan Pie.

"My mother and grandmothers rarely used recipes," the Mayor said. "I also make many dishes by learning from their example and thus have few [written] recipes to share."

Mayor Severson usually hosts big family gatherings at her house for Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year.

"I enjoy the holidays as a time to renew faith and cherish family," she said. "An attitude of gratitude helps balance a lot of challenges throughout the year."

The Mayor prepares a traditional Thanksgiving feast, complete with turkey, mashed potatoes, yams, dressing and gravy. Christmas Day begins with homemade cinnamon rolls and the day parlays into a

mountains - Siskiyou, Sierra, Lassen, Tioga, etc. One day, Sierra managed to steal 20 truffles off the edge of the counter.

"She had a cast iron stomach and was none the worse for having consumed this much chocolate," Reintjes assured.

The truffles that Lafayette's first couple entered in the fair were double-deckers, decorated and hand-painted to look like animal critters. The panda, chipmunk, penguin and snowy owl truffles won first-prize ribbons at the fair, while the bald eagle took home second.

I do not find myself with



Photos provided

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