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Concerts in the Park: Going Beyond the Bun

By Sophie Braccini



Volunteer Judy Ayres prepares a pulled pork sandwich special. Photo Ohlen Alexander

Summer in Moraga is a time when everybody goes to the park for the Thursday evening concerts. Traditionally, the food offered at the event for those without a picnic basket didn't stray much from the usual burgers and hot dogs. But board members of the Moraga Park Foundation, which funds and organizes the events, want to add culinary delight to auditory pleasure. They are now cooking different gourmet dishes at each concert. "We want to enrich the experience of the people who come to the concert by providing them with specials at each concert," says board member Stan Nielsen, who often cooks himself. "We want to be creative and possibly propose a special that matches the music playing that night."

Nielsen says it became possible when the snack shack at the Commons was expanded, giving the volunteers who spend the night feeding the community enough room and tools to be inventive. "The food we traditionally serve, hot dogs and hamburgers, is a good menu for the kids," he says, "but we wanted to add something a little more adult to the equation."

Judy Dinkle was the cook July 25 and prepared her beloved pulled-pork sandwiches. On Aug. 1, when Gator Beat performs, Nielsen will prepare Cajun fish tacos. "And when Zebop comes, we will serve grilled chicken and poblano tacos that will go well with the Latin rock music." Nobody on the foundation board is a professional cook, so they decided to start small. "We started by preparing 30 servings of the special, then as it becomes popular we will increase the number."

The specials require more costly ingredients than the traditional meals, and because the concert food is also a fundraiser for the foundation the group does not want to take the risk of preparing more than would be sold. The specials have been selling out in short order; interested diners arriving after 7 p.m. are usually out of luck.

"The board's intent is just to make the concert experience better any way we can," says Nielsen. "Maybe soon people will come not only to listen to great music, but also to have a great meal."

For more information about the Moraga Park Foundation visit www.moragaparks.org.

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