



TRADITIONS OF THANKS

By Lockie Hunter
WNC Parent contributor

The mountains of Western North Carolina are home to a variety of people, cultures and traditions. Thanksgiving is a time to gather and celebrate with food and family and showcase those traditions.

Asheville's Tracy Trout knows that each year Thanksgiving may bring new friends and family members to the table, and perhaps a new dish or tradition will be created.

"At the end of the day, with our plates empty and our bellies full, we continue the tradition of giving thanks for a day well spent with the ones we love," Trout says.

Family and feast

"We spend each Thanksgiving in Charlotte with Grandmother, Papa and lots of other family," notes Asheville's Kristie Puster. "As we travel, our girls, Katherine and Julia, sing 'Over the river and through the woods, to Grandmother's house we go.'"

Weaverville's Michelle Seeger celebrates with her mom and dad as well.

"We start the meal with a prayer, often said by one of the youngest grandchildren. It is definitely a Thanksgiving ritual," says Seeger, who always gets the



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Stacey and Brian Caskey enjoy a post Thanksgiving hike with daughter Allison.

task of stuffing the turkey.

"Our Thanksgiving dinner is traditional," adds Seeger. "My mother is Italian so until she moved to America in the '60s she was not familiar with the Thanksgiving tradition. My grandfather was an awesome cook, and he taught her how to make turkey with homemade stuffing, cranberry sauce, mashed potatoes, fresh rolls, green beans and pumpkin pie with whipped cream."

Stacey Caskey, of Asheville, always

hosts Thanksgiving at her house.

"It's the one holiday that I hold onto dearly and won't give up, even when the 'airline and weather gods' try to throw obstacles in our guests' paths," she says.

Caskey says guests include her brother-in-law Jamie and his yearly rotating girlfriend.

"We'd like to think that Jamie comes back each year to visit the family he sees all too infrequently, but I know the true reason. Jamie is madly in love with ... my mashed potatoes and squash casserole," she adds.

Honoring heritage

"Salam alaikm" is the greeting at the door when Asheville's John Bowers celebrates Thanksgiving with his Southern family and his wife's Egyptian family. "Alaikim salam," is the response.

In the kitchen he sees traditional Thanksgiving fare — turkey, dressing, rice, cranberries, vegetables. Beside the dressing simmers a potful of mashi; in the dessert lineup, stacks of baklava teeter on the tray.

"In the Carolina hills where I grew up, mashi and baklava weren't at the Thanksgiving table," Bowers notes. "But there's no doubt it's comfort food — the food of home."

As a Dutch girl, Liesbeth Mackie's first introduction to Thanksgiving tradi-

tions was cooking with the New Orleans family she married into. Mackie's in-laws are both amazing cooks, she says, using recipes that were handed down to her mother-in-law from many generations ago on the plantation where she was raised.

"The joke in the family is that these recipes are 'very complicated' and it's a matter of honor not to take any short cuts," Mackie says. "The sweet potato puree must be served in fresh, halved oranges, hollowed out by hand. On top of that every orange must be fluted. One must also make sure all the white rind is removed."

One year, Tom Mackie really followed his roots. When it was time for his mother to carry the turkey to the table he "piped that turkey in," an old Scottish custom, albeit normally performed for haggis (a traditional Scottish food).

The event was particularly poignant; Tom Mackie's father got tears in his eyes because he was so moved. He kept asking "Who is playing the pipes? Who is playing the pipes?" He hadn't recognized his son in his kilts. The next year, Mackie's father passed away of Alzheimer's.



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The Mackie family's Thanksgiving feast includes recipes passed down through the generations. The children get involved in setting the table. Pia Mackie and friend Jesse churned out individual funky "hand turkey" place cards one Thanksgiving.

Post-feast activities

Jill Clark's husband, Keith, always works the day after Thanksgiving, and so the kids and Jill put up their Christmas tree that day.

The day after Thanksgiving usually requires a hike for the Caskey family. "We all feel so stuffed from the day

before that we are itching to get out on some sort of hiking/walking adventure," Caskey says, "and we usually have great weather and dynamic scenery to burn off those extra calories!"

The Seeger family also often walks around the neighborhood afterward.

"Those lucky enough to not get roped into doing dishes can be found asleep on the couch," notes Seeger.

Puster's family briefly considers joining the post-holiday shopping crowds.

"Then, we spend the rest of the day laughing about how there is no way we are motivated enough to stay up late, get up early, or brave the crowds to do any shopping!" she says.

Giving thanks

Regardless of varying traditions it seems that Thanksgiving is a time to truly give thanks.

"At Thanksgiving the parallels between my Southern family and my wife's Egyptian family ring true," adds Bowers. "You have the food pushers, the family gossip, the closeness, the catching up, the caring — and the gratitude."



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