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**FEBRUARY / MARCH 2011**  
FREE BIMONTHLY PUBLICATION



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**ON THE COVER:**

Bethel Bakery's Crazy Daisies cake is one of the many cakes made there.

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# February / March 2011

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*“It’s the company, not the cooking, that makes a meal.”*

Those words by author Kirby Larson, as quoted by Peters Township Public Library Director Pier Lee, perhaps best sum up the idea behind the library’s newly formed Cooking Club, sponsored by Friends of the Peters Township Public Library.

Lee approached Carrie Weaver, public relations coordinator at the library, last year about forming the club.

“Presenting the Cooking Club to the patrons of Peters Township Library gives people in the community the opportunity to learn about each other as they learn about food,” Lee said.

Food, she added, is “not only essential for life, it is a part of all aspects of life with the popularity of The Food Network being proof of that. It is common ground in social gatherings.”

The Cooking Club meets year-round at 7 p.m. the first Thursday of each month. Club members vote on a topic that will be covered prior to each meeting.

“It is a very fun group with a variety of palates and experiences to share,” commented Weaver. She said the Cooking Club has been very well-received.

At the club’s first meeting in November, Weaver prepared three samples of healthy grains—a Wheatberry Salad with Citrus Dressing, a Thai dish with shrimp and brown rice, and a chocolate chip cookie using whole wheat flour.

When the club met in December, members Karen Buzzatto, Kenn Popko and Meghan Bryne prepared traditional dishes enjoyed by their families during the holidays. Buzzatto made Artichokes Natale and Italian Orange Salad, Kenn Popko prepared Rustic Chicken Liver Mousse with Spiced Prune Chutney, and Meghan Bryne whipped up Honey Cake from

“ Food is not only essential for life, it is a part of all aspects of life.”

**Pier Lee**

# Cooking Club serves up culinary delights



PHOTO COURTESY OF PETERS TOWNSHIP PUBLIC LIBRARY

Instructor Barbara Chen dishes out a serving of Chinese Fried Rice to Bonnie Shutey-Pazur .

Warsaw, a Polish dessert.

Programs pertaining to food have always been well-received at the library, said Weaver, citing the 'Food for Life' series the library sponsored last May in partnership with the Cancer Project. "We also have a very extensive cookbook collection to offer our patrons."

Club members range in skill levels. "We all discuss recipes, techniques, ingredients, places to shop, and food we have eaten at home or at restaurants," Weaver explained. "Everyone is excited to learn new things—I hear a lot of 'I didn't know that!' at the meetings."

**“** I like to learn to make things that aren't conventional American dishes. I wanted to learn new cooking techniques and wanted to learn to make food that wasn't mainstream. **”**

**Sue Lille**

Sue Lille of North Strabane said she joined the Cooking Club because "I like to learn to make things that aren't conventional American dishes. I wanted to learn new cooking techniques and wanted to learn to make food that wasn't mainstream."

One of her favorite dishes that she makes year-round is soup, most often green pea, salmon and vegetable soups. "You have something for several days and something you can share with others."

Not having a family saves Lille from doing a lot of "high-pressure cooking," which may be the reason she has come to enjoy it so much. "I don't have to think about putting a different thing on the table every single night."



*Sue Lille, left, and Donna Anderson discuss cooking with instructor Barbara Chen.*

PHOTO COURTESY OF PETERS TOWNSHIP PUBLIC LIBRARY

Lille said she "cooks for fun" on a Saturday or Sunday when she has "3-4 hours to dedicate to making soup." She likes to start at the beginning, preferring not to purchase pieces that are partially cooked.

"I think good nutrition is vastly underrated in our culture," said Lille, who tries to make healthier dishes to ward off the heart disease and diabetes that run in her family.

There was a time in her life, however, when she didn't enjoy cooking. "My mother didn't teach me how to cook. She died 21 years ago and I cooked very little when she was alive." Cooking, she said, is more of a hobby now.

"I think with so many chefs being on television they're beginning to make it more interesting," said Donna Anderson.

"My mom was more of a conventional type of cook," Lille said. "There's a lot of things I make that she didn't because my dad didn't like them."

Lee admits she may not be as good a cook as

her mother, who in 1978 taught the "overwhelmingly popular" Granny's (Chinese) Cooking Classes at the library, but tries to follow her examples and guidelines.

"Confucius said, 'The way you cut your meat reflects the way you live.' My mother lived this in her attention to detail with her cooking."

Although Lee prefers to cook Chinese, she will occasionally make Western food. However, she said, "I still have not learned how to roast a turkey!"

Barbara Chen instructed members on how to cook Chinese Fried Rice at January's class. When Lee asked Chen to choose a Chinese dish she chose fried rice because it is "simple and inexpensive."

Chinese Fried Rice is quick and easy to make, said Chen. "You can finish everything in about 15 minutes, and have all of your food groups at once." Chen said that while she is

*continued on page 12*

**COOKING** *continued from page 11*

teaching a Chinese language class at the library every Saturday, her husband is in charge of making lunch for their two children. "And guess what? He always cooks fried rice. Now you know how easy it is to cook," joked Chen.

With food allergies on the rise, more and more people are choosing to cook their own meals. "I prefer the natural, traditional and healthy way to cook," said Chen. "When you go to a restaurant you don't know if they are using artificial flavorings or colorings."

Buzzatto, one of the instructors at December's class, and her friend, Janet Sehn, attended the Chinese Fried Rice class together. Both live in Peters Township.

"I normally cook things I grew up on," said Buzzatto, adding that she always has chicken in reserve in the refrigerator for Monday night. She's then prepared for the week—to make chicken cutlets, roasted chicken and other chicken dishes.

Buying fresh is important to both. "I've never had a problem finding fresh foods," said Sehn. "If I can't find it at Giant Eagle's Market District I'll sometimes go to the Uncommon Market.

Weaver said the foods that have been sampled have all been enthusiastically received. So much so that the library plans to create a blog or website to post and share recipes.

Lee also plans to invite professional chefs to teach a few of the classes. "We are in the process of contacting restaurants, in alphabetical order by restaurant name so as not to show preference to one particular establishment, to find interest," said Lee.

Chris Umbel and Jennifer Garrett joined the club after seeing an ad. Garrett, who does most of the cooking while Umbel helps gather ingredients, pots and pans, and set the table, prefers to cook her own meals and does so at least six days per week. "I have health issues that become worse if I eat foods containing MSG, food coloring, excessive amounts of sodium, nitrates... So basically this means I cannot eat frozen foods, deli meats, hot dogs, sausage, boxed or canned goods," Garrett said, adding that the best way to control what is in her food is to cook it herself. "I actually don't mind cooking but grocery shopping takes forever because I have to read every label."

Garrett's cooking style is to "pick a protein and build a meal around that." Pasta dishes are a favorite, and she also makes good use of her

crock pot, additions spices and a bottle of beer to beef or pork dishes and letting the meat cook all day. "The beer makes a great gravy for mashed potatoes, or I use the beer to make a barbecue sauce and shred the meat for wraps or sandwiches." The couple's grill also gets a workout year-round. "We have cedar planks that we use to cook salmon," said Garrett. She rubs the salmon with olive oil and a blend of Cajun spices then adds a few lemon slices before letting it cook, which gives it a nice flavor. "I add some rice and vegetables and dinner is served."

"When I get really frustrated, I have to go into the kitchen and make something," said Lille. "That's my relaxation!"

The club will explore Irish foods in March, prepared by Umbel and Garrett, and Mexican dishes in May on Cinco de Mayo. April's topic has not yet been decided.

New members are welcome and may join at any time. However, registration is required one week prior to the meeting date so that presenter(s) can shop and prepare enough food to make samples for everyone.

A fee of \$5 is collected at the beginning of each meeting to reimburse the presenter for food and to buy paper products. ■

To learn more about the Cooking Club and other offerings at Peters Township Public Library, visit [www.ptlibrary.org](http://www.ptlibrary.org).



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*Chinese Fried Rice is an inexpensive, versatile meal that takes just 15 minutes to prepare. Try this recipe, courtesy of Barbara Chen.*

## Chinese Fried Rice

### Ingredients:

4 cups (cooked) medium or long-grain white rice  
 carrots  
 garlic  
 3 eggs  
 fresh or frozen vegetables  
 salt and ground pepper  
 fresh ginger  
 soy sauce  
 green onion  
 olive oil, sesame oil or vegetable oil  
 shrimp, chicken or pork

### Instructions:

Set aside 4 cups rice (cold, cooked rice that is preferably one day old).

Wash vegetables. Dice the carrots, garlic and green onions into

small pieces and set aside.

Add 1 tablespoon of oil to non-stick pan/wok. Place over medium heat (about 100 degrees). Add eggs and 1/2 teaspoon of salt to pan and scramble. Remove from pan.

Put another tablespoon of oil in the pan/wok and add chopped green onions and chopped garlic.

Toss the vegetables in the pan for about 3 minutes, adding 1 teaspoon of salt.

Boil the chicken, shrimp or pork.

Toss the rice in carefully. Be sure it is cooled if it has just been made, and is dry. Add approximately 1 to 2 tablespoons of soy sauce while frying.

Take 1 tablespoon grated ginger root and add it to the pan. This will bring in the taste. Be sure to add some ground pepper. Add all contents and stir fry for a minute. This will ensure that the soy sauce and pepper get mixed in the rice evenly. Serve.



PHOTO COURTESY OF PETERS TOWNSHIP PUBLIC LIBRARY

## General Chinese cooking principles

- Try to vary the meat and vegetables in a dish, so that there is an interesting variety of flavors, textures and colors.
- Always use fresh ingredients when possible.
- Have everything prepared before you start cooking: the vegetables washed, drained and cut; the meat cut and marinated; the sauces prepared.



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