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Alpha Delights to serve up specialties at Greek Cookout

*By Thomas Rozwadowski
trozwado@greenbaypressgazette.com*

Cookouts come in all shapes and sizes this time of year.

But they can't all claim to be Greek. And they can't all claim a large chunk of the sidewalk on a busy stretch of De Pere.

During a four-day span each summer, Alpha Delights European Bakery and Cafe moves beyond an already flexible breakfast, lunch and dessert menu to deliver distinctive creations that transport owner Mary Pappas back to childhood.

It's food. It's family. It's all so very, very Greek.

"If you go to Greece and drive along the streets, you'll always see somebody selling something," Pappas said. "Maybe they'll be selling souvlaki. Or maybe they'll be selling roasted corn. Or they'll have lamb on spits in the streets of Athens."

"It's just the way the culture is. It's very hospitable. It's all about making sure you have enough food and come away happy."

Translation: bring your appetite for a street celebration that redefines the summer barbecue.

Among the specialty items to be served starting Wednesday: loukanika (a citrus-flavored Greek sausage), Greek shrimp and chicken, Galaktoboureko (Greek custard), Italian berry shortcake, cream puffs and diples, a citrus-flavored dough dipped in honey, nuts and cinnamon that "really defines all the major components of Greek cooking," Pappas said.

It's no mystery that a Greek method of simplicity and tradition has guided Alpha Delights since it opened nine years ago. But like the philosophy that steers her King Cake construction during Mardi Gras, Pappas believes some things were meant to be more special.

"The Greek Cookout is a way to showcase new things or ways of doing things. Maybe they're flavors that people haven't had a chance to taste before," Pappas said.

"I think that's really what drives the whole restaurant. There are so many wonderful things in the world, things from my background, that I'd really like people to find."

Loukanika is one of the more precious concoctions from Pappas' Greek heritage. Along with her

mother, the pair re-created the handmade sausage from taste memories that were 30 years old.

"I have to say, this year I think we got it perfect," Pappas said of the sausage, which reportedly can be smelled more than a block away while being grilled. "We're always tweaking it and this year, the balances are just right. The moisture level to it ... the citrus flavor is where it needs to be. Right down to the way we zested the fruit, there's so much precision to the method."

In essence, Alpha's will have two kitchens running next week, with the cookout drawing a devoted clientele that stretches across state lines.

It's become a regular stop for so many, Pappas admits to a bit of awe in knowing that without any added components to the celebration — say, dancing, music or fireworks — it's truly about the food.

"Even if we're talking about the savory sides, they're just very traditional things like roasted potatoes. Greeks eat a lot of roasted potatoes fried in olive oil," she said. "The baked beans are Greek-style, a very simple recipe. The rice and spinach mixture is again, very simple.

"For me, it's all my childhood coming into play. Like, I specifically remember my father making the rice dish on Tuesdays, because his restaurant was closed on that day, so he'd make it at home for us. It's a family repertoire going on here. And I think the desserts especially, they're just truly, truly unique to this event."

Alpha Delights is at 143 N. Wisconsin St., De Pere; (920) 339-9144 and www.alphadelights.com.

Additional Facts

Greek Baked Beans

1 lb. Great Northern beans, soaked overnight
1 large onion, chopped
16 oz. can of diced tomatoes, with juice
1 yellow bell pepper, chopped
1 red bell pepper, chopped
1 tbsp. garlic
3 large carrots, chopped
2 stalks of celery, chopped
½ c. olive oil (these are Greek Baked Beans!)
½ tsp. pepper
2 tbsp. dill
½-quart of water (add more if necessary to cover beans by 1 inch)
½-quart of V-8 juice

Method: Cook the pre-soaked beans in a large kettle for about two hours, or until the beans are tender. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Drain the beans, but reserve some of the liquid. Then return the beans to the large kettle. Add all the remaining ingredients except the dill. Stir well.

Pour the reserved liquid back over the beans. Place the pan in the oven and bake for two hours, stirring every 45 minutes. Add dill during the last 15 minutes of baking.

There will be plenty of juices in the pan that will be absorbed by the beans as they thicken and cool. This recipe is best the next day.

