

St. Wenceslaus celebrates 100 years of chicken dinners

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Jun 20, 2009 Updated Jul
28, 2014

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SUTTONS BAY -- Back when St. Wenceslaus Catholic Church served its first chicken dinner, the food came from neighboring farms.

The meal cost 35 cents.

Now, 100 years later, the church is still serving chicken dinners every summer. The 100th annual is planned for June 28, 11:30 a.m.-4 p.m.

In 1909, the parish gathered for food and a play by the church's youth. Admission to the play was an extra 25 cents. In fact, it was even held at a different church.

In 1914, a new church was built and in 1926, it was remodeled to include the hall where the dinners are still served.

The dinner used to be held the third Sunday in July and took advantage of all the bounty Leelanau County farmers could provide. All the food was donated and included the chickens, of course, as well as vegetables, pies, kolache (a type of central European pastry) and ice cream made with local eggs and milk. Much of the food was prepared at families' homes, then carried to the church.

After awhile, the play was dropped and games were added, including bingo, over-under (a ball-passing game), chuck-a-luck (a dice game), ball tosses and more.

Other changes have been necessitated by law. Now, all the chicken and the vegetables are purchased and cooked at the church. The kitchen undergoes annual inspections and certifications.

But the festival is still geared towards families and serves a hot, delicious meal, said Martin Korson, parish administrator. There are still games, a raffle and, now, a garage sale.

This year's menu includes chicken grilled over an open pit, mashed potatoes, gravy, dressing, green beans, fruit pies, possibly cake and coffee and water, Korson said. Cost is \$12 for adults, \$6 for children 10 and younger and free for preschoolers.

St. Wenceslaus, 8500 E. Kolarik Road, is often referred to as "the disappearing church." Korson said it's because the church is on a plateau but, as you're approaching it, you go down a hill and can't see it. Then you come up the hill and voila!
