

Cooking up 50 years of memories at Browns

Browns United Church celebrates its 50th chicken barbecue

By Jeff Heuchert
STAFF REPORTER

Much like any barbecue you might attend, Browns United Church and School's annual chicken barbecue is all about fellowship and fun, and of course, not going home on an empty stomach - if that would even be possible.

The menu at last week's get-together, which took place as always on the grounds of both the church and school at Browns Corners, included countless pounds of cabbage salad and vegetables, 1,000 fresh rolls, 1,000 baked potatoes, 1,000 halves of chicken and around 200 pies - just the right amount for the 1,000 mouths they planned to feed.

It marked a special day for all those that have been involved in organizing the barbecue over the years. Last Thursday, July 19, marked the 50th year of the annual feast, which is today organized by the session of Browns United Church. The event is the church's largest fundraiser each year.

To mark the occasion, a heirloom quilt embroidered with members' signatures, old photographs and a power point presentation of past barbecues, were all set up inside a large tent beside the school. Radio station CKOT from Tillsonburg was there to provide music.

One of the first to take a stroll through the tent was Susan Towle, of St. Marys, who was one of the few members attending last week's event to have attended all 50 barbecues.

She recalls making the cabbage salad for the first barbecue back in 1958, which was attended by around 300 people, and how organizers had the chickens delivered, rather than cooked on site.

"It was started by the (Browns) Men's Club, but the women did most of the work," she quips.

"You would never have guessed it would get this large."

The first chicken barbecue was held at the end of June on the school grounds and slowly continued to grow over the years, peaking in 1988 at the 31st barbecue, when over 1,100 meals were served.

"This stretched our capabilities," says member Joyce Tate, "(so) we now sell 1,000 tickets in advance,

road.

The chickens are loaded into the cooking racks and placed over the pits. The men turn the chickens and the boys deliver them to the shed and school. Throughout the afternoon, the women deliver their many pies and the cabbage salad and rolls arrive. Members of the youth group also attend to serve ice cream atop the pies. By 5 p.m., everything is ready to go.

Bill McKay, who's attended all but one of the barbecues, says it's the generosity of the many volunteers that can be attributed to the barbecue's success and growth.

"Everybody does a little bit....and nobody gets paid," he jokes.

Tate says that the barbecue is strongly supported by the entire congregation, even the children who are willing to help with the barbecuing. "We thank all who have supported our barbecues in the past," she says, "(50 years)....not many little churches can say that."



Above, Susan Towle (left), who has attended all 50 of Browns United's chicken barbecues, and Evelyn Arthur, sell tickets as people begin to file into the church shed behind them where the meal was served. At left, Bill McKay (left) and Jay Seiler tend to the chickens, while below, Colleen West prepares the slices of pies for dessert.



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