

OUT & ABOUT

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Connecting the Mission of the Presbyterian Churches in Eastern Iowa

Kolach Kamp

by Marue White, PEIA Associate for Communications

Total immersion is not only a recommended way to learn a new language, it's also a great way to learn how to make kolaches--Czech pastries. Last Saturday I attended Kolach Kamp (KK) at First Presbyterian Church near Ely. I arrived at 6:45 a.m. as a novice kolach baker and left 5 hours later still a novice but with potential. My green Camp Wyoming T-shirt was covered with



flour (note to anyone attending KK—wear white so the flour you're wearing isn't obvious) but I had a plateful of kolaches cradled in the crook of my arm that was sure to make Father's Day extra special for my husband.

Heading into the kitchen, my stomach was doing flip-flops. I was excited about learning a new skill but I was also terrified that I would mess up and have to endure shared looks of disapproval from seasoned kolach bakers. My anxiety was unwarranted. Joanne greeted me with a warm, welcoming smile and introduced me to Dorothy who was already busy cutting off perfect 2 oz. segments of dough without using a scale. Together, they showed me what, I believe, is the hardest job of all—rolling the dough. Now, I know my way around a rolling pin but rolling the dough for kolaches means using your hands. Joanne demonstrated by taking a piece of cut dough and hyper-extending the palm of her left hand to use as a platform for the dough while cupping her right hand over the dough and rolling it. The result was a perfectly smooth and rounded oval with a "poopek" (Czech for belly button) tucked underneath. My first attempt looked pebbly and rough but I kept trying. I did improve a bit as the morning went on thanks to a tip from Karen who said that sometimes it helps to put a bit of melted butter on your palms so the dough doesn't stick.



Larry showed me how to use a baster made out of goose feathers to keep the rolled dough from drying out. When the dough came out of the proofer, it was time to learn how to make the center indentation. Marilyn demonstrated by gently stretching the dough using her "naughty fingers" to make a uniformly round and deep well to house the fillings. As I was finishing up a pan, I noticed that my "wells" were experiencing bounce-back. Nancy explained that it's easier to fill the wells "as you go" so the dough doesn't have a chance to return to its original shape.

Working with the fillings was my favorite. The number and variety of flavors is only limited by your imagination. Seeing the glossy red, ripe raspberry filling juxtaposed against the pale dough made baking seem like an art form. Next, the kolaches were set on the counter for a final proofing and then baked for 5 minutes at 475 degrees, alternating between the bottom and top oven racks. The fragrant, baked kolaches received one final basting of butter for a finishing sheen and were set out to cool on paper covered tables. We made a little over 105 dozen kolaches to fill multiple orders scrawled on two sheets of legal paper.

Learning a new recipe is always a fun experience but learning from women and men who have a skill honed by a common heritage is like the "jiska" (crumb topping) on the kolach.

Editor's note: Ely FPC not only makes kolaches for fund-raisers but they also bake for Kolach Kare—a ministry that provides kolaches to friends and neighbors who are ill or shut-in.