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215 Reasons to be Thankful

Cathy Dausman



There were extra credit points to be awarded to JM students who came dressed for the feast. Here, teacher-turned-"Pilgrim" Fran Strykowski is surrounded by a group of young "Native Americans" - from left: Camie Home, Taylor Cardenas, Strykowski, Ava Tajbakhsh, Ivey Merrill; front: Gabby Thompson Photo Andy Scheck

Over 200 Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School eighth grade students enjoyed an outdoor Thanksgiving meal last Thursday as the culmination to their history lesson about the very first Thanksgiving.

Foods teacher Jill McTaggart popped four cleaned and brined birds into school ovens early that morning while students and parent volunteers assisted later with decorating, set up and serving. "They're just so anxious [to eat]," said parent Sue Tenerowicz, serving the meal for her second Joaquin Moraga child. "Look at their big eyes," said another.

The boys were focused on the obvious: "free food" for their stomachs. A table of girls admitted they enjoyed this Thanksgiving celebration as much as the legal holiday because "this one is with friends."

The meal tradition was established 15 years ago by teachers Carol Robak and Fran Strykowski. Each year while the students gobbled up turkey, mashed potatoes, gravy, cranberries and pumpkin or pecan pie the weather remained dry -something to be thankful for this late in November.

Strykowski stresses that the Thanksgiving menu of today is a far cry from the real, first Thanksgiving. There were no cows (hence no milk products), no cranberries and no turkey, and the bread was a fried, corn-based affair. There was plenty of seafood, including lobster and clams, and perhaps wild fowl. The early settlers had in fact nearly starved their first winter in New England, and 18 months later were only eating what they grew, shot or caught. The celebration lasted several days, but only once did they celebrate with their Native American counterparts.

Relations between the two groups were a bit strained to say the least. Yet Strykowski and fellow teachers Paul Schindler and Kerry Warmboe see their school event as a memory these students will carry into high school; and that is something they are all surely grateful for.

Are You Smarter Than a JM 8th Grader?

By Cathy Dausman

Joaquin Moraga eighth grade students are stuffed with historical information about the colony's first Thanksgiving celebration, including these tidbits from Fran Strykowski's vast collection:

- The first Thanksgiving menu included eel pie (whipped cream? No thanks!)
- Before it carried Pilgrims, the Mayflower transported wine.
- Although there were acres of cranberries nearby, none were served at the first Thanksgiving.
- The first Thanksgiving took place in mid-October; Abraham Lincoln established the official holiday as the fourth Thursday in November.

Test your knowledge:

1. What year did the Pilgrims have their first Thanksgiving feast?
2. Which of these items did the Pilgrims eat: lobster, pumpkin pie, corn, cheese
3. Name the Governor of Massachusetts during the first Thanksgiving
4. Americans didn't care about Thanksgiving during George Washington's presidency. Why not?
5. Who led the crusade to establish Thanksgiving Day?
6. Which president moved the date of Thanksgiving not once, but twice?
7. What percentage of Americans eat turkey on Thanksgiving Day?
8. Name the first state to celebrate the "official" Thanksgiving
9. Which country actually consumes more turkey than the U.S. annually?
10. How much does a day old turkey weigh?
11. True or false: wild turkeys cannot fly.
12. How far away can you hear a turkey gobbling?

Answers:

1. 1621
2. Lobster and corn
3. William Bradford
4. They were preoccupied with the country's move toward independence
5. Sarah Josepha Hale
6. Franklin D. Roosevelt
7. 93%
8. New York
9. Israel (26 pounds/capita); the U.S. rate is 17 pounds/capita
10. 2 ounces
11. False. Lamorindans know they can fly. They can also run 20 mph.
12. One mile. That means in Lamorinda you can hear them everywhere!

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