

A village meal is never complete without the bread

Published: August 5, 2009

There's not a feast in France without bread. The Village Feast, the annual fundraiser for the Davis Farm to School Connection, set for Davis' Central Park on a Saturday in August, is modeled on a southern French summer meal called the Grand Aïoli. There has to be bread. You've got to have bread.

It sops up the vinaigrette from the platters of heirloom tomatoes and olive oil; it sops up the aïoli, the yummy garlic mayonnaise that accompanies platters of steamed and grilled summer vegetables; and it sops up the juices on the platters of lamb. No one can get enough bread.

This year at the Village Feast, the grand dame of regional summer food events, the food will be sourced directly from vendors at the Davis Farmers' Market.

Jamie Buffington, the Village Feast organizer, who is also the development director for Farm to School Connection, invited all the market vendors to participate. She says the response couldn't have been better.

"We're thrilled to be serving John Bledsoe's lamb, which he generously donated to us," Buffington says.

Jim Eldon is supplying the squash. Ed George is providing red and yellow onions plus his garlic (for that all-important aioli — aïl for garlic and oli, Provençal dialect for oil.)

The bread? Buffington says Aziz Fattahi is back with his bread from the Village Bakery, by demand, for the fourth year in a row.

The Village Feast raises funds for Davis Farm to School Connection (think of it like a school lunch booster club) to support the school district in all things culinary — including garden-based learning, local farm field trips and recycling post-consumer lunch waste.

At the feast, whole baguettes are laid out on each table for people to break with their hands and pass, literally breaking bread with their neighbors. The bread just keeps coming and coming, brought to the tables by the Buckhorn catering staff, along with family-style platters of food.

"I feel honored to supply bread to the Village Feast," Fattahi says, "The majority of people in this community appreciate good bread."

Fattahi told us he's been to the Village Feast and hopes to make it again this year. "The feast has a chemistry," he says, "a kind of European feel that definitely brings out a sense of community."

Soon his bread will appear at his newest culinary project — The Village Pizza and Grill. His interest and passion for all things old, including the old way of making bread, led him to open his new restaurant (planned for early August) in a historic home at Fourth and G streets.

He's focused on restoring the beautiful wooden floors, and preserving the doors and windows. Although it's all about the food for Fattahi, it's also about the environment in which the food is served — something Farm to School couldn't agree with more, says its president, Dorothy Peterson.

Part of the environment is the setting up. Davis Farmers' Market vendors and shoppers watch the Village Feast backdrop being assembled each year in a corner of Central Park.

The banquet tables arrive and are set up by a brigade of volunteers into one long rectangle to seat 300 under the shade of the sycamore trees. After the tables come the chairs, followed by the white linen

tablecloths and flowers placed at every setting.

At precisely 11:30 a.m., ticket holders can pass through the gateway of flowers, mark their coveted spot at the table (where they think the most shade will be) and lay down their plates, silverware, napkins and water glasses they brought in their picnic baskets.

Shortly before noon, guests will be sipping the Dunnigan Hills Matchbook wines selected and provided by Nugget Market and a watermelon cooler, settling in with friends and family to celebrate the local farms, food and community.

— Georgeanne Brennan is an award-winning cookbook author and freelance writer based in Winters and Provence, France, where she has a cooking school. Reach her at gbrennan@yolo.com. Ann M. Evans, a former mayor of Davis, is a food writer and educator based in Davis working on farm to school programs throughout California. Reach her at annmevans@aol.com. They are the co-leaders of Slow Food Yolo (www.slowfoodyolo.com).

Bread and Tomato Salad

Since fresh-baked bread doesn't contain preservatives, it can dry out quickly. But this isn't a problem because there are so many wonderful uses for old bread, from bread pudding to crumbs and croutons.

A favorite is bread salad. For this dish, choose a coarse-crumbed bread. Fine-crumbed bread will become soggy, while the coarse-crumbed holds its shape as it absorbs the vinegar and oil. If desired, add chicken pieces rolled in bread crumbs and fried until golden.

Ingredients:

1/2 loaf of 2- to 3-day-old, coarse-crumbed bread such as a baguette or olive or walnut bread
3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
1 tablespoon red wine vinegar
1/2 teaspoon sea salt
1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
3 large, ripe tomatoes, peeled, cored and coarsely chopped
1/4 to 1/2 cup small basil leaves, or torn if large

Putting it together:

Trim the crusts from the bread and discard. Cut the bread into 1/2-inch cubes. Set aside. If the bread is still quite soft, put a little olive oil in a skillet and sauté the bread until golden, turning several times.

In the bottom of a salad bowl, combine the olive oil, vinegar, salt and pepper. Add the tomatoes and turn gently. Add the bread and basil, turn several times and serve immediately.

Serves 4 as an appetizer or side dish.

Upcoming Yolo food and wine events

* The fifth annual Village Feast is noon Saturday, Aug. 22, at Central Park.

This is a long, multi-course lunch under the sycamore trees, featuring all-local products, including lamb from the Davis Farmers' Market, prepared by Buckhorn Catering.

Participants bring their own tableware, including plates, knives, forks, and spoons, as well as cloth

napkins. Wine glasses will be provided.

Special auction items this year include a plein aire painting of you and your group at the feasting table, a week at a writer's village house in Provence, pasta lessons at Osteria Fasula, and collections of Yolo County wine samplers.

For more information, write [http:// www.davisfarmtoschool.org](http://www.davisfarmtoschool.org) or call (530) 219-5859.

Tickets are \$65 in advance, \$55 for Slow Food members and \$75 at the door.

* The Earthquake Festival is from 5 p.m. Friday, Aug. 28, in downtown Winters. In addition to live music and dancing, there will be artisinal wood-fired pizzas using local ingredients from Putah Creek Café. The cafe opens Aug. 14 for Friday night dinners, and wine from Berryessa Gap. Both are on Main Street. For more information, visit <http://www.ycvb.com>.

* Yolo County Fair gala and tastings:

The gala opening is 6 to 8 p.m. Wednesday, Aug. 19. Tickets are \$10 in advance and \$15 at the door. This sampling of the wines and foods of Yolo County is in the Agriculture Business Building of the Yolo County Fairgrounds, 1125 East St., Woodland, CA 95776.

For more information, see <http://www.yolocountyfair.net> or call (530) 402-2222.

The Tasting of Yolo County Bounty is Friday and Saturday, Aug. 21 and 22, and free with general admission in the Agriculture Business Building.

Copyright, 2009, The Davis Enterprise. All Rights Reserved.