



# 52<sup>nd</sup> Annual Greek Festival

By Emily Lullo

**What:** Pensacola Greek Festival

**Where:** Pensacola Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church

**When:** Friday, October 14, 11 am-10 pm

Saturday, October 15, 11 am-10 pm

Sunday, October 16, 12 pm-6 pm



*Greek dancers*



*Crowds gather to enjoy the Greek Festival*

Each year in October, Pensacolians look forward to a yearly celebration of all things Greek—the architecture, dancing, traditional garb, history and music. But a personal favorite for many is the uniquely delicious Greek cuisine. The 52<sup>nd</sup> Annual Greek Festival is upon us, and with it comes the chance to wrap your maw around a variety of culinary delights like warm pita stuffed with spiced gyro meat and tangy tzatziki, crispy fried calamari, flaky, cheesy spanakopita and an array of pastries and desserts that could keep your sweet tooth sated well into winter.

A lot goes into preparing the immense amount of food that is served each year, (and that always sells out by the festival's end). In fact, preparations begin mid-summer and continue up until the weekend of the festival. Last month, DTC went behind the scenes to help out with the cooking, along with some of the many volunteers that share the work of getting all the food perfect for the festival.

Sissy Watson oversaw two days of pasta prepping—that's not the noodly pasta you might be imagining, but a Greek sweet consisting of layers of phyllo, nuts,



*Kok (pronounced Koke)-A Greek pastry*



*Grecian torte*

custard and whipped cream. An all volunteer team gathered around 9 am to shred tightly packed bunches of the strands of phyllo, also known as Kataifi pastry, into loose layers on the bottom of pans that were baked, and then covered with layers of nuts, custard and cream.

Two days of work later, 90 pans of pasta are ready to go. While the seasoned Greek ladies I helped shredded phyllo and spread chopped walnuts about three times faster than I could, the experience definitely illustrated the hard work that goes into the preparation for all the scrumptious goodies that are one of the focal points of the annual festival.

Rose Thames, a former festival chair who is working with current festival organizers, says the food has traditionally had the spotlight of the festival, but it has also introduced other aspects of Greek culture to the many gyro-lovers that flock to the church for its festival each year.

“Starting in early July, most every week there are three or four days of cooking being done,” she says. “We welcome people to come down and participate in the preparation of the food. They can just come watch or learn how to do it.”

Regular Greek Festival attendees know there are three food areas. There’s the Dinner Line, which offers chicken or lamb dinners, Greek salads and a la carte items like spinach pie or beef and rice stuffed grape leaves, called dolmathes. At the outdoor courtyard Taverna Grill, hungry festival goers can pick up gyros, calamari, sausages, a skewered chicken item known as souvlakia and more. It’s not a true Greek Fest experience without a visit to the Hellenic Center where more than a dozen types of pastries and dessert items from baklava to napoleons to a Greek biscotti called paximadia.

While noshing on your spoils in the huge outdoor main dining area, you can view another popular attraction at the festival. The church has various age groups that perform traditional dances in Greek garb.

“We have a band coming in from Atlanta and they’ll be performing. We also have our dance groups, which are always a favorite,” Thames says. “After the dance performances we invite the audience to come up and join.”

Additionally, Greek Fest offers tours of the Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church, followed by choir members performing some traditional Gregorian hymns common to the liturgy. In the Hellenic Center, attendees can purchase souvenirs and gifts as well.

The proceeds from the festival help fund some of the church’s ministries and building funds, but it’s also an opportunity to give back. Each year, a charity is chosen to receive funds from the proceeds of the festival.

“It’s our way of giving back to the community of Pensacola,” Thames says. “This year it’s United Ministries but we are also going to accept donations for Manna Food Bank.”

Boxes will be set up to accept donations of nonperishable items on the festival grounds. Thames says the free festival is almost a block party, and the family friendly atmosphere offers something for everyone.

“We’re more than happy to share our food and culture with the community and give people a taste of the flavor of Greece.”



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## Pasta Dessert

This layered dessert is just dreamy – a Kataifi pastry base soaked in syrup, a custard filling and fresh whipped cream topping. Pasta is the Pensacola version of this dessert – which is also called Ekmek Kataifi by the Turks.

### For the pastry base

½ cup melted butter  
1 pound Kataifi pastry (shredded filo)

### For the syrup

2 cups sugar  
1 ½ cups water  
Juice of ½ lemon

### For the custard filling

½ cup flour  
½ cup sugar  
3 cups milk  
4 egg yolks  
1 tsp vanilla  
¾ lb cream, whipped  
Toasted almonds

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Butter a large rectangular baking pan (at least 9" x 13") that is deep enough to accommodate the layers of this dessert. To make the base, separate the strands and layer them in the pan. Don't press down as they are better if left light and fluffy. Brush the remaining butter over the pastry and bake in a moderate oven for 30 minutes or until golden brown. Allow to cool.

Begin making the syrup by boiling the water and sugar for five minutes. Remove from heat and add the lemon. Pour the hot syrup over the toasted pastry.

Prepare the cream filling next. Mix flour and ½ cup sugar in the top of a double boiler. Stir in milk. Stir constantly until thick and smooth. Stir a little of the hot mixture into slightly beaten egg yolks. Then slowly stir the eggs into the hot mixture. Cook over hot water for 2 to 3 minutes, stirring constantly until custard thickens. Remove from heat and then add the vanilla. Pour the custard over the kataifi pastry base. Chill for 2 – 3 hours. Cover with whipped cream and garnish with toasted almond slivers or other topping. Cut into squares. Makes 22 pieces. Can be frozen.

