

Sausage making is family affair

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

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Koch/Kugler clan carry on ancestral tradition

Friedrich Peter Koch probably never imagined his ancestors would carry on his sausage-making tradition more than a century later.

Friedrich, who was from Frauenzimmern, Germany, traveled to the United States by boat in 1893 and eventually settled in Eustis. He joined two brothers who were already there.

This great grandfather of Goth-

enburg resident Dean Kugler, Bill Koch and Gilbert Koch, both of Eustis, and Don Kugler of Denver, CO, farmed and was a custom butcher.

“He took his tools in a spring wagon that was pulled from farm to farm by a team of horses,” Gilbert said.

On this chilly winter day, Dean and some of the Koch/Kugler clan are gathered in a local building owned by Dean near his house.

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They are slicing beef and pork that will be ground, mixed stuffed, dried and smoked into Friedrich's age-old recipe.

Dean, whose mother was a Koch, learned how to make the sausage from his uncle Herman in Eustis.

That was in 1966 when Dean first moved to Gothenburg. In the 1970s, he moved the yearly sausage-making get together to his hometown.



The key, he said, was to find the right equipment—a grinder and a mixer for the beef and pork.

Amie Guerin of Gothenburg, who Kugler claimed could make anything, replicated a borrowed mixer from Eustis, Dean said.

Since then, Koch/Kugler relatives have gathered at Kugler's home to make sausage and tell tale tales.

"We always do it in February because it's cold and the meat doesn't spoil," Don said, noting that President's weekend is usually involved since it offers a three-day weekend.

On the first Friday of the process, some of the clan gathered to cut the meat which is then layered and sprinkled with salt and a cure mix and placed in a cooler.

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The second weekend, which was last Friday, Saturday and Sunday, relatives ground the meat chunks and stuffed the mixture into casings from cow intestines and tied the ends.

Dean said the stuffer was the one Friedrich used.

After the sausage was dried, it was smoked last Sunday in a special building.

Dean constructed the tall structure in which a deep bed of oak coals, sprinkled with hickory sawdust, is placed.

Nearly 300 pounds of sausage is hung and smoked in the building.

When it's done, the sausage is wrapped in butcher paper and loaded into vehicles for the relatives to eat year round.

What Don said he liked about the meat is that it's not seasoned with "hot stuff" and follows Friedrich's recipe.

The Kochs/Kuglers also sprinkle in nutmeg, garlic powder and ground white pepper.



"And there's no preservatives," Dean said, noting that each year, the sausage tastes better.

"Because we get more skilled each year," Bill said.

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The sausage-making process used can't be repeated on a commercial level, Don said.

"So it tastes much better," he said.

Don said he and his wife, Judy, make the drive from Denver for two weekends in a row for the sausage-making process and companionship.

"If we come together without having something to do, we'd have one God-awful brawl," he said with a laugh.

Judy described the get together as "one crazy, wonderful family tradition."

Dean's daughter, Connie Jenner, is a fifth generation Koch/Kugler.

She said the yearly gathering means "good eating" for a year.

"And it's always nice to get together with cousins that I don't get to see very often," Connie said.

This year, about 26 Koch/Kugler parents, children and grandchildren attended the second of the two sausage-making weekends.

By Sunday noon, 305 pounds of round, straight and bulk sausage had been processed.

For Dean, having four grandsons in attendance was special.

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“It’s fun,” he said. “It’s a family get together any way you cut it and a tradition with a project that keeps people together. You also get something good to eat.”

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