



The baking group at Temple Israel making macaroons for the Jewish Food Festival features Chris Grossman, Lala Clark, Michelle Sonnenfeld, Brenda Vaughn. JILL KLEIN

Brittle and babkas

Group of women bond over baking treats for Jewish Food Festival

Amanda Sieradzki Council on Culture & Arts

Jill Klein knows that sharing is caring, especially when it comes to baking. Her life-long passion passed down from grandmother to mother has manifested in her chairing the baking committee at Temple Israel's annual Jewish Food and Culture Festival event.

She is not a one-woman show by any means however, and she takes pride in the baking her group of dedicated committee members accomplishes in a few short months. The upcoming festival on Sunday, March 3, will be no exception. This will be her ninth year as baking committee chairperson for the fundraiser. For nearly a decade, her Wednesday evenings and Sunday afternoons have been full of friendship, flour and fun.

"The women are wonderful," says Klein. "We bake and prepare around this big table in the middle of the kitchen and we're all chatting about families, books, movies and trips. We just have a great time talking among ourselves."

The volume of baked goods shakes out to almost 100 dozen batches of each item for a grand total of nearly one thousand cookies, cakes and other assorted goodies. Klein says the group begins baking these items months in advance, utilizing the large ovens and freezers in the temple's kitchen to preserve everything for the spring festival.

That's five hours per week hands-deep in dough for matzo brittle, babkas, black and white cookies and more. For Klein, finding herself covered in flour is a natural state of being. She looked up to her mother and

If you go

What: Tallahassee Jewish Food and Culture Festival

When: 10:30 a.m.-4 p.m., Sunday, March 3

Where: Temple Israel, 2215 Mahan Drive

Cost: Free

Contact: For more information, call 850-877-3517 or visit <https://www.templeisraelth.org/jewish-food--cultural-festival.html>.

grandmother as a child, and learned their recipes from a young age. Her signature bake? Oatmeal chocolate chip cookies.

"It won the best cookie in Tallahassee award a few years ago," says Klein. "In college, my roommates and I would make them once a week. We call them our Apartment B cookies and we treat ourselves to them when we get together."

The container of handwritten recipes in her home is well-worn, and the legacy continues on with her children. Klein says her two daughters love to bake, as well as one of her sons. One of her family recipes featured at the festival is hamantaschen.

The triangular shaped cookies are given a center of delectable filling and are flavored with almond which Klein believes makes them even more special than a regular sugar cookie. Traditionally they are made for Purim, a holiday were Jewish people celebrate being saved from Haman, a man from the Book of Esther.

"The cookies are shaped like a triangle which is Haman's hat," says Klein. "We eat it as part of the Purim celebration because Haman was an evil person in the king's court that wanted to kill all the Jews."

Passover macaroons are another popular item made with almond and coconut extract. Many recipes don't contain flour to observe the religious holiday. Instead cakemeal, matzo and potato starch are used as substitutes.

Klein says the recipes that get selected for the festival are contributed by her committee members as well and include honey cakes, Mandelbrot and rugelach. Rugelach are Klein's favorite to eat, though baking them is very time and labor intensive.

"Rugelach are small and sweet and have a little bit of chocolate and fruit filling in them," says Klein. "I make the dough with sugar, butter, cream cheese and flour at home before we meet because it takes so much time and has to chill. Once we all meet to bake it has to be rolled out, cut, filled with raspberry or apricot jam and some chocolate chips and nuts before being cut a certain way and rolled up."

One committee member usually takes on the shopping list, which is bought in bulk. Klein says coordinating and setting up the bakeshop is a huge undertaking the day before the festival. Cookies are taken out to thaw and are given finishing touches and the room is set up with sampler platters and individual cookies and breads.

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