

Freedom fare

Juneteenth celebration serves up a piece of history, and plenty of good food from 'Men Who Cook.'

Sunday News - Jun 20, 2010 00:11 EST

Lancaster

By LARRY ALEXANDER, Staff Writer

Media Center

On June 19, 1865, some 2½ years after it took effect in the rest of the nation, the Emancipation Proclamation was read to slaves in Galveston, Texas. After more than a century of bondage, the entire black race in America was finally free.

To commemorate the event, Crispus Attucks Community Center hosted its third annual Juneteenth celebration Saturday at Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology.

"This event allows us to share with the Lancaster community what Juneteenth is all about," said Crispus Attucks director Cheryl Holland-Jones. "There are still so many people who don't have a clue."

To help spread the message was speaker, author and historian Sidney Taylor, who stressed to young people that they can improve their lot in life if they choose.

"Young people today need to be reminded of their past," he said. "They too easily accept their social or economic status thinking 'This is where my status is in life. I was born here. My father did this, and it's what I'm going to do.' But that doesn't have to be the case."

Taylor said President Barack Obama is proof that people can move forward and attain goals they might otherwise never attempt.

"People can step up today," he said.

Local historian Leroy Hopkins gave a history of how Juneteenth was observed in Lancaster over the years, and why it is important to remember the day.

"Freedom is something that had to be earned," Hopkins said. "We have a certain disconnect today. We don't know our history. We've become complacent because of some sort of economic success, but people back then knew what had to be done to achieve that freedom."

Juneteenth is also a celebration of diversity, both among people and in what they eat.

"Juneteenth is always celebrated around food," Holland-Jones said.

To mark that aspect of the holiday, the Men Who Cook portion of the event highlighted the culinary specialties of 36 local people whose talents in the kitchen some might find surprising.

"You see people here today that you'd never picture them as being able to cook," said Lancaster police Chief Keith Sadler. "I'm sure a lot of people say that about me."

His piece de resistance is Chicken and Sausage Cacciatore.

"When I was learning to cook as a teenager, this was the first or second dish I learned how to make," Sadler said.

He admitted he has never written down a recipe, so his dish "ends up as it ends up."

The dishes, all of which were available for sampling by the 200 or so people in attendance, were as varied as their creators.

State Rep. Mike Sturla made warm Vidalia onion dip; Justin Thomas cooked up General Tso's Chicken and Paul Culbreth served black-eyed peas.

Lancaster City Councilman Jose Urdaneta made pernil (pork hips). Lancaster County Commissioner Craig Lehman whipped up deviled eggs and former council President Ted Darcus dished out Southern fried chicken and corn bread.

"I love doing this," Darcus said. "I love participating and watching people come here and enjoy themselves."

Ron Ashby sliced off succulent portions of two fresh-roasted turkeys that, he said, were "walking around on Thursday."

He said he separates the skin from the breast and places his spices under the skin. He then steams the bird until it is finished, then roasts it in a convection oven at 400 degrees "to crisp it up."

"It gets nice and tender and juicy," he said.

City Councilman Joe Morales and David Holland-Jones engaged in dueling dishes as each served triple baked beans. The two differed in that Morales' creation included bacon and hot dogs; Holland-Jones used ground beef.

"We should have some Beano on the table," Morales joked.

State Sen. Lloyd Smucker made a pan of macaroni and cheese which, he said, has a historic origin.

"Mac and cheese is thought to have been introduced to America by Thomas Jefferson," Smucker said. "There's reference to a mac-and-cheese pie in the Library of Congress that Jefferson made after he came back from France."

Smucker called the Juneteenth celebration a "wonderful event."

"It's sort of a second Independence Day here in America that doesn't get a whole lot of attention," he said.

alexander@lnpnews.com

Read more: <http://articles.lancasteronline.com/local/4/260639#ixzz0rVjmM8Ci>