

Eating our way through Fair Week

July 26, 2011



By GWEN SISSON

sdnlife@bellsouth.net

One thing is for sure, the friends and family gathered at Obe's Acres this week at the Neshoba County Fair are eating their way through Fair Week.

Jim and Harriet Laird of Starkville are among fair-goers at the Obe's Acres Cabin who will enjoy Aunt Peggy's "Texas Trash," Jim Laird's Sausage Balls and Dolly Smith's Caramel Cake.

"Needless to say, we all tend to gain a few pounds during fair week," Laird said.

Laird said the Neshoba County Fair is special to her because it is all about family and friends. "This is the one time out of the year when members of our family take time out of their busy schedules to gather for a week of fellowship, fun, and good food," Laird said. "When you combine the atmosphere surrounding the fair with these other things, it turns out to be a great week – a week spent out in the middle of rural Mississippi with only intermittent wi-fi for computers, no television, and more dropped cell phone calls than ones that actually go through. And, add the Neshoba County red clay dirt and dust into the scenario, which can in an instant turn to red mud, it seems like a trip back in time."

Since it is has been a "wet Fair" so far this week, there is a lot of red mud.

"It's definitely an addiction that can't really be described," Laird said. "With thousands of people staying in more than 600 two- and three-story cabins and in about 200 RVs, it probably sounds like total chaos, but it's surprising how it all fits together into one nice little community for that one week each year.

Laird said for people who suffer from obsessive-compulsive disorder, the fair would probably not be a very pleasant experience.

"The kids are naturally going to get dirty and muddy, the kitchen is not always going to be clean, and the same routine is not going to be followed each day," Laird said. "But for those of us who love it, this is exactly the beauty of it."

The Laird's stay at their family's cabin, Obe's Acres, which was built in 1982 and named after her late grandfather, Obe Farish, of the Stallo community in Neshoba County.

"It was built in 1982, the year I graduated from Decatur High School, so of course my friends

and I thought it was just awesome that my family was building a cabin," Laird said. "The cabin is very special to us not just because we feel we are continuing the tradition of the Neshoba County Fair. It is also special because my grandfather had been very interested and involved in seeing the cabin become a reality."

Laird said her grandfather had donated the wood for it from what they call 'The Old Place' — his old homestead. Laird said he died shortly after the cabin was finished.

Laird's father, Ovid Vickers is a long time newspaper columnist who has written about many Fairs over the years.

"Breakfast is always my favorite time of day at the Fair since all the children and teens often sleep until noon," Vickers said. "Nothing is better than a cup of black coffee, a sausage and biscuit, and two eggs "over light."

Vickers said family members come in from all over the South to attend the Fair, and Vickers and his wife, Carol, stock groceries for breakfast and the noon meal. They average about 15-20 people for lunch each day. But supper is a different story.

Each night, the supper meals are divided among the families. They will travel from all over the South, not only with clothes and water for the week, but all of the supplies necessary for their night to cook supper.

Saturday will be Laird' night to cook.

"People will compliment Harriet on her supper, but if the truth were known, she usually goes somewhere visiting while her husband Jim prepares the food," Vickers said.

On Thursday night, Carol Vickers and her granddaughter, Carol Ann, will create a feast of fresh vegetables.

" My night to cook is always just vegetables which many of the family don't get very often," Carol Vickers said. "This would include peas, butterbeans, snapbeans, squash, okra, corn on the cob, sliced tomatoes, and of course cornbread. Dessert is usually some kind of cobbler — this year peach cobbler because there seems to be bumper crop."

Carol Vickers said the best part of Fair Week are the the shared memories built by their grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

"Since this is proving to be a 'rainy' fair, they have played in the red mud, walked in the rain, changed clothes several times a day, played a lot of card games, and generally gotten to know one another since they are not together very often," Carol said. "Two of the 'ring leaders' are Harriet's girls. The older one came to the fair for the first time when she was five days old and hasn't missed one since!"

The Fair has even more special memories for the Laird, as the place where Jim proposed to Harriet in 1995.

"To say the least, it was quite an unusual proposal," Laird said. "I may be the only woman, or among a very few, who was proposed to while her fiancée's good friend, Wesley Ellis, stood next to him and grinned – all in an alley between two cabins surrounding the fair's pavilion. It's a wonder the ring wasn't dropped in the sawdust and lost forever."

Among some of their favorite Fair activities, Laird loves the harness horse races.

"Each day when the races start at 2 p.m., we each pick a number – one through seven – from a deck of playing cards and each put a quarter in a cup," Laird said. "Then if the horse with your number wins the race, you get the jackpot of \$1.75."

Hannah and Harper Laird, love the midway rides. The Ring of Fire, Tilt-a-Whirl, and even the Ferris wheel are among their favorites.

But Laird said the most amazing event during the fair is the “chair race.”

"After the horse races are over and before the night's grandstand entertainment, fairgoers take their lawn chairs down to the racetrack to try and get a good spot for whatever 'big name' performer will be there," Laird said. "No one is allowed to put their chairs out until the grandstand announcer says the word 'go.' As soon as he does, the crowd stampedes out onto the track to set up their chairs. When the chaos subsides, all of the chairs are in perfect rows around the grandstand side of the racetrack. Unbelievable."

Harriet Lairds Fair Recipes

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Dovie's Squash Casserole

It is difficult to fail with this recipe.

Ingredients are simply estimates, but it always turns out well.

3 or 4 medium yellow squash

1 large onion

Salt and pepper to taste

Water to cover

Stew the above for about 15 minutes. Drain and mash with potato masher.

Allow to cool for 10 or 15 minutes.

Add:

About 3/4 cup milk

1/4 cup margarine (I use low fat)

2 eggs (beaten)

2 tablespoons flour (self-rising)

Small amount of shredded cheese (optional)

Spray Pyrex baking dish with Pam.

Pour mixture into dish and bake at 360 for about 25 minutes (or until slightly brown on top).

Optional: Sprinkle more cheese on top and return to oven to melt before serving.

Heavenly Dirt

1 large Cool Whip

2-8 oz. pkg. cream cheese (softened)

2 large vanilla instant pudding

1 cup powdered sugar

3 cups milk

2 tsp. vanilla

1 pkg. Oreos

Cream together cheese and sugar. Add pudding and milk. Beat until smooth. Add Cool Whip and vanilla. Chill. Grind Oreos in a food processor or by hand. Layer Oreos and cream mixture in a brand new tin pail or glazed flower pot. Cover top with Oreos. Place artificial flower in center and add gummy worms around top. Serve with a garden trowel.

JIM'S SAUSAGE BALLS

1 pkg. ground pork sausage (Bryan is recommended and we like hot)

1 pkg. Cracker Barrel extra sharp cheddar cheese (the Vermont white cheddar works too)

3 cups (or thereabouts) Bisquick

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Cube cheese and melt it slowly in a double-boiler. (Microwave not recommended.) While the cheese is melting, put Bisquick into a really large mixing bowl. We usually use a little less than 3 cups because they turn out less doughy tasting. Open the sausage and crumble it — raw — over the Bisquick. Most sausage ball recipes seem to use cooked sausage, but that just doesn't work as well as starting with uncooked sausage and melted cheese. Once the cheese is melted, pour it over the Bisquick and uncooked sausage combination. Use your hands and mix the three ingredients into dough. Watch out for the hot cheese!

When the dough comes together, take a small piece of it and roll it into a ball (a little smaller than a golf ball). Place on a baking sheet and leave plenty of room around each one. Bake for 16-20 minutes. Cooking times can vary widely, so check them after 16 minutes, but be prepared to let them bake a few more minutes. Let cool — a wire rack works best.