

Polk takes favorite dishes on the road with friends, Bulldogs

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Whether it is caring for a sick friend, cooking for the Oktoc Country Store or following the Bulldogs, the Polks are about good food that's good to go.

The Polks are members of three RV Clubs that travel throughout the nation, bringing food, fun and a sense of adventure to the experience.

One of the RV Clubs centers around Bulldog sporting events, giving the Polks the opportunity to watch their favorite college team on the road with some of their favorite friends.

Frances Polk said the wagon master plans the trip and the RV Club will park together, play cards, eat meals together and go out to eat at least once during a trip. All the other meals are potluck, and usually involves a cooking competition of sorts. They are members of the Tenn Tom Travelers and the Mississippi Travel Trailer Club, which is one of the oldest RV Clubs in the state.

"The trips are always well planned and there are great places to stay," Frances Polk said. "It is a lot of fun."

While on the road, Bill Polk will make his famous "secret ingredient" pancakes for breakfast. In the wintertime, the group may prepare a variety of soups or chili. Bill may also cook fried fish, barbecue chicken or chulupa for the RV trip. Frances Polk may prepare her chicken and dumplings—a dish she is known for throughout Starkville.

"You should see her when she gets finished with the dumplings," Bill said, laughing. "She is always in a hurry and flour is all over."

And when the Bulldogs play at home, the Polks join their friends in the Rollin' Bulldogs RV Club for tailgating in Starkville.

Bill said there is nothing more fun than the Southeastern Conference Basketball Tournament when the Bulldogs are on a roll. And the Polks are there, with all of their RV friends.

"We had so much fun tailgating last fall with our group," Frances said. She said her chili won second place in their chili cooking contest. She used black eyed peas instead of the traditional chili beans.

Everyone also loves Frances' Lace Cookies, that she cooks on a cookie sheet covered in aluminum foil, shiny side up. The cookies come out of the oven light and crisp. The cookies are peeled from the aluminum foil, leaving the cookies with a pretty caramelized bottom.

“Every pan does differently in the oven, so you have to watch them,” Frances Polk said.

Another popular dish prepared by Frances is her pimento and cheese, featuring her “secret ingredient” — dry ranch dressing mix. Bill is not a fan of her pimento and cheese, but Frances is quick to point out that Bill is not a fan of ranch. Just last week, the Polks discovered a new recipe for biscuits that they both love and can’t wait to try out on RV friends this fall. Frances said mix 2 cups of self rising flour with 1 1/2 cups of whipping cream. The Polks said the results are delicious.

While they both love to cook, they tend to suffer from “too many cooks in the kitchen” syndrome.

“(In the kitchen together) is the only time we really argue,” Frances said. “The kitchen is a dangerous place to fuss.”

Frances grew up cooking and eating great food. She was raised by her aunts, who would make chicken and dumplings for her “after school snack.”

Bill has always loved to cook and collecting cookbooks. He loves to find a recipe and make it his own.

“When looking through old cookbooks, you can always find something in one, and other ideas in another,” Bill said.

He enjoys taking a dish and finding new ways to make it his own.

Bill is best known as one of the original Brunswick stew cooks at the annual Oktoc County Store. The Polks moved from Oktoc to Starkville a few years ago, and Bill retired from the all night stew cooking event.

But chances are, Bill will still be found stirring a pot or two this fall.

For those attending the Oktoc Country Store, Frances’ desserts have long been a staple of the Country Kitchen with many of her friends in the Oktoc Community.

The recipes for many of the Polks favorite dishes, including the recipe for the famous Oktoc Country Store’s Brunswick Stew, can be found in the Oktoc Heritage Cookbook, sold throughout the year by members of the Oktoc Garden Club to raise money for the Oktoc Community Center.

The Polks are also very involved with their church, Starkville’s First United Methodist. Among other church activities, Frances is known for making chocolate sheet cakes to deliver to members and friends who have become ill, recently had a baby or when a loved one has passed.

Bill loves to eat and feels obligated to taste-test everything Frances makes.

“She doesn’t cook anything bad,” Bill said. “Everything she cooks is wonderful.”

Their neighbor and long-time friend, Dr. John Paulk, said Frances was an excellent cook.

“She makes the best soup in town,” Paulk said.

Frances said taste-tests Bill’s cooking as well. She loves Bill’s barbecue, his red beans and rice, his grilled chicken and his chalupa.