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For the St. Paul Rodeo

CRY “FOWL”

*St. Paul Rodeo features home-made chicken dinner courtesy
the St. Paul Catholic Church*

St. Paul, Ore. (June 5, 2023) – Some of the St. Paul Rodeo volunteers could cry “Fowl!” during the rodeo.

Or they might be running around like a chicken with their head cut off.

Some of them get up with the roosters on rodeo days.

But none of them chicken out.

No puns intended, but thanks to a couple hundred volunteers with the St. Paul Catholic Church, St. Paul Rodeo fans get to eat the famous barbecue chicken.

For more than fifty years, a dedicated group of volunteers has barbecued half-chickens, using their famous secret recipe for the marinade. This year, they plan on cooking 9,000 lbs. of chicken, which works out to about 6,500 half-chickens.

The chicken is sold from two locations: a stand on the rodeo grounds, and in the downtown St. Paul Community Hall. Even though the rodeo is the big attraction in town, many of the chicken dinners are sold to people who don’t even go to the rodeo.

Laurie Nicklous, chair of the barbecue chicken stand and a St. Paul Catholic School teacher, said that people drive from Portland and Salem and other places, just to get chicken for their Fourth of July dinners. A local realtor treats her staff to a thank you party with the St. Paul chicken, and tour groups coming for the rodeo eat there, too.

“We make it so they can pull in easily, pick up their chicken, and be on their way,” she said.

Dinners consist of a half-chicken, cut vertically down the middle so the eater can enjoy all the chicken parts; plus coleslaw and two slices of garlic bread, plenty of food to keep fans happy and full.

The food is prepped and wrapped each day for that day’s meals, Nicklous said, to keep things as fresh as possible. Bread is buttered and sprinkled with garlic each day; coleslaw is mixed with the dressing each morning and packed into cups, “to make sure it’s nice and fresh.” The chicken is barbecued daily by the Knights of Columbus in Gervais.

The bread and coleslaw crew arrives at 7 am each day, ready to prepare those items. The chicken is cooked at midday, so it's fresh for the day. And the crew isn't done until after the rodeo starts, at 7 pm each night. "Every day is at least a twelve-hour day," Nicklous said, "for five days straight."

Nicklous is proud of the volunteer spirit of the workers. It's a tradition among many of them and their families.

She has a friend who always works on July 4, along with the friend's four kids, her brother, her father-in-law, her dad, and her dad's friend.

"That adds to the fun of it. You get your fun team together. It is so much work, but it is so much fun."

The friend's father is in his eighties but still helping. "He said to me the other day, 'now just you remember, I'm coming in for the fun on the Fourth.' He marks that down on his calendar. He's ready to roll, and I so appreciate people like that."

Money raised from the parish's activities at the rodeo go to a variety of things. It supports the parochial school for field trips and it goes to community activities, too, like a holiday breakfast with Santa.

"The church and the school have been around since the 1800s," Nicklous said. "For us to be going strong after all these years, it takes a lot of work."

There is a sense of purpose and camaraderie among volunteers, she said.

"We don't think about it. It's always the way it's been done, the way it is. But that's the beauty of this community (of St. Paul). We come together and do so much, and in this day and age, it is truly amazing. No one questions how much time and effort goes into this. We're just proud to be part of it, and it keeps going.

"I think that's why people like to come to St. Paul. I think they are in awe that a community of our size puts on an event of this size, to that proportion."

Nicklous was bestowed with the title of "chicken mama" for her dozen years as chairwoman of the barbecue chicken.

Everyone loves a good chicken dinner, she said.

"This is just a good home-cooked comfort meal. When you can get that, people really love it.

"There is nothing better than when you open that fresh hot box of chicken. It is fantastic."

She, like so many other volunteers at the St. Paul Rodeo, loves helping.

“It gets in your blood, it really does,” she said.

The St. Paul Rodeo runs June 30-July 4, with performances nightly at 7:30 pm and a 1:30 pm matinee on July 4.

Tickets are available online at StPaulRodeo.com. They range in price from \$20 to \$60.

For more information, visit the website or call 800.237.5920.

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Cutlines:

1 Barbecue chicken is ready to be served at the St. Paul Parish barbecue chicken stand, open during the St. Paul Rodeo. Photo by Hoot Creek/Kent Soule.

2 Coleslaw and buttered garlic bread are the sides for the famous barbecue chicken served by the St. Paul Catholic Church at the St. Paul Rodeo each year. Photo by Hoot Creek/Kent Soule.