

We give thanks

Families bond over Thanksgiving traditions

By Lockie Hunter
WNC Parent contributor

The act of celebrating Thanksgiving often has common elements: family, food and football. But most families have unique traditions that help bond them together and keep the holiday as a living memory.

"Thanksgiving has always been our holiday," said Stacey Caskey, teacher at Claxton Elementary and mother of kindergartner, Allison. "We may rotate houses for Christmas or Easter dinner, but everyone knows that Thanksgiving is at the Caskeys'. Brian and I spend weeks searching through all of our Southern Living magazines until we get the menu just right."

Cooking collectively

"Allison loves to help cook," Caskey said. "She gets her apron on and is ready to start cooking bright and early on Thanksgiving morning. My memories are less about the actual dinners and more about the great times that Brian, Allison and I have spent cooking together in the kitchen."

Special cooking projects are also a great way to bond and celebrate the season. Angie Cullen, an Asheville mother of two elementary-aged girls, notes that her husband's mother throws a gingerbread house-making party. "We use Graham crackers, icing 'glue' and every candy under the sun to create our little snow-covered cottages. They are really getting quite elaborate over the past few years, trying to out-build and out-decorate each other."

Often the meal includes multigenerational dishes, teaching children the importance of tradition and the value of honoring their grandparents through food. Kim Stewart, of Leicester, says "we have my grandmother's cornbread dressing (which my mom now makes). We always include rolls, which no one can fit onto their plates or in their stomachs, and also the obligatory Southern Jell-o salad, sometimes lime with celery and cheese or a cranberry/Jell-o/Cool Whip concoction."

Local families may add an Asheville twist to their meals. Holly Musgrove, of Asheville, cooks her great grandmother's traditional chestnut dressing, except she doesn't stuff it in the turkey and she uses soy sausage.

"We also get a heritage turkey and use fresh organic vegetables instead of the canned kinds called for in the old recipes. I guess it's sort of our own



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Back row, from left, are Holly Musgrove, Cameron Kurowski, Neil Kurowski, Jack Kurowski, Paige Cambell, Polly Kurowski and Lute Cambell. Front row, from left, are Craig Kurowski and Sophia Cambell.



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Allison Caskey enjoys a post meal romp in the leaves.

twist on the old favorites," Musgrove said.

Post-meal activities

From football to naps, Asheville families celebrate differently.

"After dinner, we usually gather leaves on the front lawn and let Allison dive right in," Caskey said.

Musgrove noted "at some point we usually will play a little football with the kids and watch some of a game. You can't have Thanksgiving without

football."

Beginning new traditions

As a recently divorced mom of two 5-year-olds, Tanya Fletcher is just beginning to create new family traditions at her parent's home in Miami.

"I had aunts and uncles come in from Puerto Rico, and we were all able to catch up and enjoy some time together," Fletcher said. "After the big late afternoon meal, we all went for a walk to the park. We always go around the table before diggin' in and everyone says something that they are thankful for. That usually ends up getting everyone teary-eyed. It was fun last year because the kids were able to contribute with things they were thankful for."

Kim Stewart hosted Thanksgiving for the first time last year at her new house, "which felt like a handing off of the generational torch. Too bad I haven't learned to cook for a crowd yet."

Thankful remembrance

Don't forget to mark the holiday with a tribute of thanks. "Before we eat we go around the table, and everyone has chance to share what they are most thankful for. I love to hear what the children have to say," Musgrove said.

Caskey added, "The love I have for my family is what I give thanks for each year."