

STEINBACH

SCHMECKS APPEAL

Eatery draws crowds to Mennonite Heritage Village

BY KRISTIN MARAND

On Sunday afternoons, the Livery Barn Restaurant inside the big red barn at Steinbach's Mennonite Heritage Village is hopping!

Familiar scents of farmer sausage, perogies and freshly baked desserts waft through the air as neighbours and colleagues greet one another. Intergenerational families share large tables in stable nooks. A group of tourists wearing name tags sing a blessing before their meal. They have all come to partake in a kind of Prairie soul food—hearty, comforting and nourishing, it's a traditional Russian Mennonite meal reminiscent of Oma's kitchen.

While the restaurant is open daily from May 1 through Sept. 30, Sunday's buffet is the busiest time of the week at the Livery Barn. It offers fresh buns and a variety of salads, komst borscht (a meat- and cabbage-based soup with onions, potatoes and dill), two kinds of perogy (vereniki), vegetables, meatballs, chicken and foarma worscht (farmer sausage), plus brown gravy and the stuff Mennonite dreams are made of—Schmauntfatt, a rich and savoury cream gravy. Along with main-course options, there are copious fruit salads and baked goods, including the signature rhubarb plutz, a cake-like dessert with a crust, fruit filling and crumb topping.

Cottage cheese vereniki and komst borscht are the two most popular items on the Livery Barn menu, and they are available on any given day.

"We have traditional meals we never change," explains food services manager Yulia Asraf, referring to the six main dishes on the menu. But what you might not know is that every day of the week offers something different. "The specials change every day," she says. Wednesday for example, is chef's choice, where the special might be Mexican, Israeli or Italian. On Tuesdays, the Livery Barn serves local fried pickeler.

"On Tuesdays, I have four people who drive every week from Winnipeg for my fish," Asraf says.

As she discusses the specials, a woman walks by and compliments the potato salad. "I haven't tasted this in years!" she exclaims.

The Livery Barn menu features a combination of hearty meals and lighter fare, reasonably priced (\$6 to \$17 for an entrée) and locally sourced. Breads and buns are baked in-house, made from whole wheat flour, which is stone ground at the museum's wind mill. Meats come from Mitchell Manitoba's Unger Meats and the vereniki from Kleefeld's Country Perogy Shop. Most of the produce comes from Pratts, especially in the early part of the season, but later in the year, the rhubarb, dill, parsley, potatoes and cabbage come fresh from the museum garden across from the barn.

"It's so nice to go and pick it in the morning and walk over to the restaurant," says Asraf.

The Livery Barn's traditional recipes have been handed down from generation to generation and most can be found in



Food services manager Yulia Asraf (top and above centre), says bread is made from wheat ground at the museum's mill, and some produce is fresh from the garden. PHOTOS BY DARCY FINLEY

Breads and buns are baked in-house, made from whole wheat flour, which is stone ground at the museum's wind mill.

the Mennonite Heritage Village Cookbook, available in the museum gift shop. Asraf explains that 'traditional' doesn't have to mean old-fashioned.

"If somebody is concerned about not coming here because of their special requirements they should come try it because we have dairy-free, gluten-free, vegetarian and vegan meals."

The Livery Barn is a popular destination on special occasions throughout the summer months, including a Father's Day

buffet, which is twice the size of the regular Sunday buffet, Canada Day and during Steinbach's Pioneer Days in August.

The restaurant can also provide catering for special events held in the museum's new summer pavilion, auditorium or meeting rooms. The museum entry fee is waived for those who just come for the food. However, if the meal whets your appetite to learn more about the culture and history of Manitoba's Mennonites, kindly pay on your way out.

Upon reflecting on what she'd like people to know about the Livery Barn, Asraf cites an old saying that's frequently applied to Steinbach attractions. "It's worth the trip. It really is."

Visit the museum website (mennoniteheritagevillage.com) for hours, daily specials and menus.