

TRENDS, TASTES, TEMPTATIONS AND NUTRITIONAL GUIDANCE



IT'S BACK!

By Gretchen McKay
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Do you start dreaming of sugar plums even before the Halloween decorations go up? Consider flour, sugar and butter the three essential food groups? Obviously you're a cookie baker!

We'd love for you to enter our **2023 Holiday Cookie Challenge**. All you have to do is submit your recipe (with a picture, if possible), and you could win some great prizes, along with bragging rights in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette.

After selecting the top recipes in each category, the PG food team will do all the heavy lifting by baking, tasting and judging the cookies. We'll have help from local celebrity judges, including Gene Walker, executive director of Cafe Momentum Pittsburgh, a fine dining restaurant and culinary training facility for justice-impacted youth that is our partner in the third annual Holiday Cookie Challenge. Winners will be featured in a story in the PG Food section on Dec. 14.

SEE **CONTEST**, PAGE E-3



Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
Christine Ballew's recipe for soft and cakey Maple Pecan Cookies — made with root beer — took top honors in the 2022 PG Holiday Cookie Challenge.



Dorothy Ratesic hand rolls a beef and pork mixture into a cabbage leaf to create sarma.

ST. SAVA'S SARMA

Stuffed cabbage cook-off ready to roll in McKeesport

By Gretchen McKay
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Dorothy Ratesic and Dee Dee Baskot know a thing or two when it comes to the Serbian stuffed cabbage dish known as sarma.

For instance: A blend of twice-ground beef and pork from Lampert's Market spiced with a generous pinch of Vegeta all-purpose seasoning makes an excellent filling. And if you refrigerate the cabbage leaves after boiling to make them pliable, don't forget to wipe each one dry with a paper towel because "they'll get wet" in the fridge, Baskot says.

Cooks also will want to remove the hard triangular rib from the base of each cabbage leaf with a paring knife before adding an ice cream scoop of filling — it'll be hard to roll otherwise. Also, to replicate St. Sava's signature sauce, you'll need to hand squish the canned tomatoes for a smooth texture.



Photos by Tim Robbilaro/For the Post-Gazette
St. Sava parishioners Dorothy Ratesic, left, and Dee Dee Baskot prepare trays of sarma in the kitchen of the McKeesport church.

"All that diced stuff [in a can] ... It tastes like something's in it," says Baskot.

Because the hearty, stick-to-your-ribs dish takes longer than you might think, especially when prepared for a crowd, it's also good to have a great cause to motivate you in the kitchen. On a recent Saturday, their cause was St. Sava Serbian Orthodox Church's 122nd anniversary celebration on Nov. 4-5.

With roots stretching to 1901, St. Sava was the first Serbian Orthodox parish established east of the Mississippi River and is the third oldest in the U.S., says member Mike Vranesovic. That's why every anniversary merits a bash for its 120 or so members, considering how many local churches

SEE **SARMA**, PAGE E-2

Taste the terroir of Ohio's Grand River Valley wineries

By Dave DeSimone

When Pittsburghers drive to Northeast Ohio, it usually means they're heading to Cleveland to visit the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame or maybe catch the Steelers playing the Browns.

But if you enjoy drinking wine and eating well while visiting vineyards, then Ohio's Grand River Valley about 45 miles east of Cleveland offers the perfect opportunity for a fun fall getaway.

The Grand River Valley is an easy two-hour drive from Pittsburgh on the Pennsylvania Turnpike and a few side routes through Ohio's Amish Country. On a recent visit, the glorious autumn colors were just reaching their peak as we arrived in the vineyards.

The key to the region's grape

-growing success turns on the French idea of "terroir." The concept holds that a vineyard's climate, soils, geology, sun exposure and air circulation, combined with a winegrower's choice of grape varieties and level of work, all play a key role in the quality of wines produced.

As a sub-appellation of the larger Lake Erie American Viticulture Area, the Grand River Valley's terroir benefits from the modifying climate of Lake Erie, which lies about 7 miles to the north. The lake freezes in the winter and the resulting cold air off the lake delays the spring grape-growing season, helping to avoid frost damage to the vines and new fruit.

Later in the spring and throughout the growing season, the Grand River's deep gorge, which runs



Grand River Cellars features hand-painted murals and craft cocktails in addition to fine wines. The restaurant sometimes offers a Pittsburgh "Yinzer" hot dog with pierogies on it.

from east to west near the vineyards, sucks cold air down while leaving warmer air on top. The warm air circulates around grapevines planted on the rolling hills above the gorge. As the lake warms over the summer and into the fall, it keeps the vineyards warm and extends opportunities to ripen fruit well into October.

Grand River growers

In 1971, winegrower Tony Debevc Jr. of Chalet Debonné Vineyards in Madison, Ohio, decided to capitalize on these conditions in the heart of the Grand River Valley. He convinced his father, Tony Sr., to launch a commercial winery with a twist. They started growing

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