

Annual festival celebrates Greek food, culture

Events

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JON WEIAND/SENTINEL

Dancers enjoy traditional Greek music during the 32nd Annual Greek Festival in Santa Cruz on Saturday.

Downtown Santa Cruz event marks 32nd year

By **SHANNA MCCORD**
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SANTA CRUZ — An important part of the 32nd annual Greek Festival downtown is the food.

Spicy grilled lamb and chicken and fried sweet desserts waft from the festival's center on Church Street to Pacific Avenue.

Hundreds of people show up for the three-day festival, held every September, simply to sample the array of authentic Greek cuisine — dolmathes, loukoumathes, gyros, moussaka, tiropita and souvaki are among the many offerings.

In addition to the food, there's live music and vendors lining the street in blue tents crammed with jewelry, clothing and other goods.

There was even a raffle for a free trip to Greece.

The festival is a fundraiser for the Prophet Elias Greek Orthodox Church of Santa Cruz.

"I like it all, but the desserts all look really good," Boulder Creek resident Darragh Lawrence said. "The food is fabulous, the music is fabulous. The crowd is always a lot of fun."

The majority of the Greek fare is made by church members.

Fotiny Ballas, 77, starts preparing her classic, and very popular, loukoumathes weeks before the event.

She makes several hundred of the deep fried dough balls spiced with cinnamon and soaked in a honey syrup from scratch each year.

"This is the best part of the whole fair," Ballas said. "It's all homemade. It keeps me busy for days."

Sophie Moore, president of the parish council, said the festival helps pay the church's mortgage.



JON WEIAND/SENTINEL

A cook prepares a roasted lamb during the 32nd Annual Greek Festival in downtown Santa Cruz on Saturday.

IF YOU GO

32ND ANNUAL GREEK FOOD AND CULTURAL FESTIVAL

WHEN: noon to 8 p.m. Sunday

WHERE: 223 Church St., Santa Cruz

INFORMATION: www.propheteliassantacruz.org

"Everyone at this church is so dedicated to the church and community," Moore said. "They really come all out for it."

For Santa Cruz resident Zena Krakowsky, Saturday was her first visit to the Greek Festival.

She tried several of the traditional dishes, including lamb meatballs and spanakopita, a spinach pie made with phyllo dough.

"The seasoning is wonderful," Krakowsky said. "I love the flavor. I'm ready for the baklava."

As well, it's a chance to connect with the community and share Greek traditions with others, she said.

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