

Ministry Minute

Community Meal Dessert Baker

“Westwood’s Cookie Crusader: The Sweet Side of Dean Almquist”



When Westwood member Dean Almquist says he raided his mom’s cookies, he doesn’t mean her cookie jar. He means her cookie recipes.



Dean bakes the majority of the desserts served weekly at Westwood’s Community Meals, which restarted Sept. 11 after a summer break. His contribution for this week’s kickoff meal – his mom’s gingersnaps – a favorite for many at the Wednesday night gatherings.

The Meal is popular, often drawing 200-250 to healthful meals that offer people a chance to meet neighbors and friends for conversation and camaraderie.

“It brings people together,” Dean said.

Other specialties in Dean’s repertoire are sugar cookies, snickerdoodles, coconut macaroons, lemon poppy seed muffins, and oatmeal lace cookies. He found the oatmeal lace recipe in his mom’s recipe box. He also looks for favorites in old church cookbooks, including those from Westwood.

Last year he helped Kitchen Manager Ann Kisch revise the Community Meal recipe book, adding some of his mother Jean Almquist’s recipes.

Almost every Tuesday, he turns up in the Westwood kitchen to bake sweet treats. He also turns out sugar cookies for the holiday dinner, and sometimes other bakers provide special treats like Rice Krispie bars or pizzelles.

“If we didn’t have a good, yummy dessert, I don’t know what we’d do,” said Ann, a food service specialist.

Dean had volunteered for other Community Meal duties but stepped up as baker about six years ago when the previous baker retired.

“I thought to myself, my mom was a good baker, and I like to bake,” Dean said about his decision.

He has been a member at Westwood since his parents, Jean and Wes, moved to the area from North Dakota in the mid-1960s. Both were devoted members and now rest in Westwood’s Columbarium.

As an adult he worked for an engineering firm and his most recent job was as a water resource specialist for Three Rivers Park District. But, Dean says, he made a tough decision at age 59 when both his parents died within a year of each other.

“I said, I’m done. I decided life is too short, so I went to human resources and retired.”

Freshwater biology was his specialty area. Now at 65, his specialty is freshwater fishing. He’s sometimes called upon to operate a grill for a Westwood event. He also bakes at home in addition to his time in front of the oven at Westwood. Dean and his girlfriend Louise Ogden enjoy his coffee cakes and cookies.

So, what’s Dean’s favorite from his mother’s kitchen?

“My mom used to make these meringues with chocolate chips and corn flakes.”

You could almost hear him lick his lips at the mention of them.

