

Three Days in October

by Karine Sahagian

What happens when you put a spoonful of dedication, a dash of planning and a pinch of organization? You come up with a robust blend of talent and one of the most successful bazaars in the history of Soorp Khatch Armenian Apostolic Church.

Planning for the annual bazaar began in early September with support from Der Hayr, the board of trustees and church sister organizations. Under the leadership of board vice-chair, Irene Abrahamian, who served as the bazaar chairperson, preparation for workshops, publicity and all the minute details that make up a mega event got underway.

“Our experienced volunteers, over 140 of them, from the Ladies’ Guild, Hamasdegh School, ARS, Hamazkayin, Homenetmen, Senior Citizens and AYP, worked tirelessly before and during the bazaar to make this event a success,” said Irene Abrahamian. “As we got closer to the bazaar dates and with the publicity we were receiving, a big turnout had been anticipated. We never imagined longer than normal lines for food and baked goods, as well as, a hall filled to maximum capacity. It was indeed amazing.”

What was so special this year as compared to other years? We may never know the answer but let’s speculate that it was combination of good weather, unexpected surge from publicity and of course, food, sweets and Armenian coffee.

Thanks to a Washington Post photographer who had archived a bazaar-related photo from the previous year, the leading city newspaper listed the three day event in the Washington Post’s Going Out Guide column, days before the big occasion. To top that, Barbara Harrison, a long-time anchorwoman with Channel 4 News (local NBC affiliate) featured Akabi Atamian and Anahid Dardarian on her morning TV show, again a few days prior. Not only the bazaar was promoted “on air” but TV viewers were treated to a quick demonstration on how to cook Imam Bayaldi. Barbara Tutelian, who spearheaded this year’s publicity, hopes that next year “other TV stations will follow suit, and the momentum will continue.”



While outreach was essential, it was equally important to organize the food and baked goods workshops with precision and an army of volunteers. Seasoned cooks and bakers, novices, long time members and new ones, were called upon to help the Ladies’ Guild and ARS. For several weeks, workshops on torshi, choreg, boereg, manti, yalanchi and other baked goods were conducted. “I spent my Sundays at church, talking to people and getting them to sign up for workshops,” said Maro Nalabandian. In fact, according to Maro, one volunteer who had recently relocated to Washington, came to help after a friend told her how much fun she had many years ago, participating at another workshop.



The nucleus of the operation did not stop there. Many members of AYP showed their support in serving food and participating in clean-up. It seems the spirit of volunteerism also spilled over to our very young volunteers who turned out to be a great help in organizing the smooth flow of the very popular Kid’s Corner, where face painting with Maral Apkarian was on every child’s list. To complement creativity and imagination in youngsters, Teny Abrahamian and Ello Tanashian were also on hand with crafts and balloon art.

Apart from the delicious food and the widespread table of baked goods tended to by members of ARS, the hall decorations from table clothes to floral trimmings looked very impressive, courtesy of Hakinth Terpandjian. With earthy tones and ochre colors throughout the hall, the change of season was evident all around as people mingled with each other and found time to browse around.

The usual gourmet table, administered personally by Zvart Albeyaz, was much smaller in scale but still carried the all-time favorites, torshi, frozen lahmajoun and manti. High quality items donated by our parishioners adorned the Attic Treasures table (formerly known as the White Elephant). A welcome addition to the scene was “Little Armenia” with souvenirs and mementoes handmade and manufactured in Armenia. It made it even more glamorous and inviting with Eleanor Caroglanian and Tzoline Achikian wearing beautiful Armenian costumes.

On the final day of the bazaar, an unprecedented number of people came to sample what is next best to a home cooked meal. Of note, Congressman Frank Pallone, Jr. (R-NJ) and former U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Armenia, H.E. John Evans and his family stopped by and were welcomed warmly by Der Hayr and board members. Also joining the list of honored guests was US Marine Corporal Kevork Khachadurian, a wounded American-Armenian serviceman and recipient of the Purple Heart for his bravery and service in Afghanistan. A large number of younger generation of Armenians came, no doubt thanks to Facebook!

Startled to encounter a bigger audience than usual, everyone pitched in with utmost calm and camaraderie. “For hours on Saturday evening, and on a continuous basis, we prepared rice pilaf, Imam Bayaldi and other side dishes, while the men at the grill, cooked succulent beef and chicken kebabs,” described Zabel Sabounjian. “We were going non-stop.” The hardworking grill masters-in-chief, Hrayr Atamian, Hamo Dersookian and Zohrab Arabian, our bar managers, Vahe Doudaklian and Vicken Dombalagian, and all the ladies who prepared the food and managed the kitchen under the guidance and direction of Akabi Atamian and Mary Garabadian, do earn a round of applause.



With hardly any left overs, it is safe to ascertain that the food and sweets were indeed highly desirable. When asked, a non-Armenian summed it eloquently, “This food is so delicious, so aromatic and so fresh, I don’t have any other words to describe.” It goes without saying that the trendiest brew for the bazaar was Armenian coffee prepared with care and by request. The demand for this drink grew gradually after “odar” guests saw it being served. They asked for “espresso” coffee only to be reminded gingerly that they were drinking “Armenian” coffee.



For three days in October, our community turned into a “Little Armenia.” We openly welcomed people from all walks of life, regulars and first-timers; a politician, a diplomat and a war hero. For those who missed the bazaar this year, there will be a repeat performance. For now the curtain remains drawn but before you know it... October 2012 will be around the corner.