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The annual project was one of the many community successes of Rae Goforth, the beloved “mayor of Uniontown,” who served on the society’s board between 1993 and 2000.

She took over the plum pudding production from another volunteer many years ago, and she baked them so well that no one else really bothered to find out how.

When she died, Rascoe stepped up to the plate.

“I wear all sorts of different hats as marketing director,” he smiled. “I get to participate where needed, and I’m not afraid of the kitchen. It was such a tradition for so many people who would have been disappointed if it didn’t continue.”

Pudding ponderings

So last year, Dian Kazlauskas and the other volunteers held their breath as Christmas approached. Strange aromas wafted out of the kitchen in the basement of the adjoining Carriage House as the new cook perfected his pudding.

Despite its name, it is absent any plums; in southern

‘IT’S A TRADITION HERE AT THE HOUSE AND GIVES PEOPLE THE FEELING OF THE SEASON.’

— **Sam Rascoe**, describing Christmas plum pudding at the Flavel House

Britain, it’s called Christmas pudding, a name coined by novelist Anthony Trollope in 1858. The main ingredients are raisins, blended into a thick cake mixture with walnuts and breadcrumbs, flavored by cinnamon, cloves and nutmeg. This thick mix is spooned into a kettle, sealed with a tight lid and steamed for about three hours. It comes out as a dome-shaped cake and is usually a very dark brown color.

“You really have to grease the pot,” Rascoe said. “Then, when it is cool, they pop right out. Otherwise, they stick to the pan and fall apart — and you have a big old mess!”

Cutting the slices of this firm concoction requires a sharp knife.



LEFT: Dian Kazlauskas is gearing up to welcome visitors for tea and hopes to recruit others to enjoy the joy of volunteering at the museum. **MIDDLE:** The Flavel House in Astoria is one of most attractive and distinctive landmarks on the North Coast. It offers two Christmas events, plum pudding teas and a visit from Santa. **RIGHT:** Sam Rascoe, marketing director at the Clatsop County Historical Society, enjoys a taste test of his plum pudding with lemon sauce, and a cup of tea.



PATRICK WEBB PHOTOS

“We add lemon sauce, whipped cream and garnish with a cherry and a sprig of holly for decoration,” he added.

There was some nervousness last year. “We were concerned about how the first batches would turn out,” he said.

No one need have worried; his dessert passed muster, and will be repeated this year. “He does a fabulous job,” laughed Kazlauskas. “I think Rae would have been proud of him.”

Rascoe deflected any praise with his customary modesty, pointing to his substantial slice.

“Rae would have scolded me and said I cut them too big,” he smiled, spooning on

some lemon sauce, which adds needed sweetness to each bite.

Visitors can take home a flyer that includes this not-so-secret recipe as well as some amusing “plum pudding ponderings,” which include its history, quotes from gourmards and many associated superstitions.

A historical dessert

The puddings date back to the 1600s. Traditionally, each member of a family took a turn stirring the mix for good luck or the entire family stirred it together. Sometimes silver charms — like rings, coins, thimbles or buttons — would be tossed into the batter. Legend was that anyone

receiving a ring in their slice was destined to marry within a year.

The smallest silver coin, the sixpence, was baked into such desserts as late as the 1970s; British children receiving one in their portion were encouraged to make a wish. Inevitably, naughty boys would horrify their mothers by pretending they had swallowed it.

In ages past, cooks would start preparing the Christmas pudding in August, regularly stirring the mix, adding shots of brandy, and covering it with a cheesecloth for cool storage. When it was served, more brandy would be poured over the rounded top and set alight, giving it a burned but flavorful crust.

Rascoe said his version is alcohol free so it can be enjoyed by all ages.

The 2017 version of plum pudding will be served with

Flavel House Special Blend tea. It’s a Ceylon-Chinese tea carefully blended by Rick Murray, owner of Astoria Coffee Co. Customers who especially like it can buy some more at the gift shop to take home.

Kazlauskas volunteers at the Flavel House most Mondays and delights in spending time surrounded by its history.

“I am very protective of the house,” said Kazlauskas, who has volunteered for 17 years. “It’s fun — all the people that you meet, working with other volunteers, and meeting visitors from all over the world.”


‘A happy house’

This time of year, groups from businesses come to the Flavel House for their gift exchanges; Portland-area visitors sometimes come dressed in Victorian styles. The house also hosts an annual Mothers Day tea, and caters to cruise ship excursions.

Plum pudding and tea will be served daily, starting Saturday, Dec. 16, through Saturday, Dec. 23. After two days off to enable volunteers to spend Sunday and Christmas Day with their families, the teas resume Tuesday, Dec. 26 (aka Boxing Day), and conclude Saturday, Dec. 30.

For Rascoe, the extra work at this time of year is all fun, because of the reward. “It’s a tradition here at the house and gives people the feeling of the season,” he said.

Kazlauskas agrees.

“There’s just something about being here that feels good,” she said. “It’s a happy house.” 

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