

Meal program bridges cultural divisions, one plate at a time

By **Natalie Pompilio**
The Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — On the menu, the flavor profiles seemed incongruous: Chinese dumplings, Italian-style roast pork, and a Mexican chicken dish featuring an edible weed.

But when dinner was served — the guests seated and plates bearing foods of three different cultures shared — it all made sense.

The meal was part of “Breaking Bread; Breaking Barriers,” a year-long program that brings people of different backgrounds together for a meal featuring their cultural favorites, bridging differences one plate at a time.

“People cooking and eating together happens every day, but it doesn’t often happen across our social boundaries,” said Anuj Gupta, general manager of Reading Terminal Market, a historic and sprawling indoor market and home to the program. “It’s an incredibly powerful tool to cut through whatever social barriers you want to erect.”

Jews and Muslims have shared Jewish apple cake and baklava as part of the program. Members of the African-American and Korean-American communities have come together to compare fried chicken recipes.

During the most recent gathering, residents of the city’s Chinese and Mexican communities enjoyed dinner with members of the Philadelphia Mummers Association, a 10,000-strong civic association behind the city’s annual New Year’s Day parade.

For much of their history, Mummers groups included only white men. Women weren’t allowed in the parade until a few decades ago. The tradition is also a family legacy, with many clubs based in southern Philadelphia.

While the 2017 parade was controversy-free, past parades were tainted by performances dubbed racist or culturally insensitive. The Mummers have tried to diversify, creating a division in 2015 specifically for ethnic groups.

The dinner consisted of Chinese dumplings with pork or kale; verdolagas con pollo (verdolagas is an herb also known as purslane that’s largely considered a weed by Americans); and roasted pork rolled with spinach, roasted peppers, and provolone cheese, the Mummer contribution in a nod to a popular Italian-American dish served on New Year’s Day.

Before the meal, chef Alice Ye taught Mummer Jay Polakoff how to



CONNECTING THROUGH CUISINE. Cristina Martinez, left, co-owner of the Mexican restaurant El Compadre in Philadelphia, teaches Carol Wong, center, and Wei Chen, right, how to press tortillas during a June dinner at Reading Terminal Market in Philadelphia. People of different backgrounds are sharing meals from their cultures as part of a yearlong program called “Breaking Bread; Breaking Barriers,” which organizers say brings people of different backgrounds together for a meal, bridging differences one plate at a time. (Alex Styer/Bellevue Communications Group via AP)

make Chinese dumplings as the other diners watched. Someone noted that Polakoff’s seemed a little, well, misshapen.

“It’s actually a hamentashen,” Polakoff said, referring to the tri-cornered confection associated with the Jewish holiday of Purim.

Gathered at tables, the 40 community members shared details about the cultural backgrounds and favorite foods. In one grouping, the diners — of Irish, German, Polish, Mexican, Cambodian, and Italian descents — talked about a dumpling being a universal food, with multiple cultures having a version: pierogi, ravioli, empanadas, kreplach. The conversation flowed thanks to a facilitator from the Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations.

In discussing the shared meal, Oscar Galvan, a mechanic who is a native of Mexico, said he was tempted to put hot sauce on his Italian pork dish. They also reflected on how food related to friends and family.

“One of the neatest ways to promote friendship is to share your ethnic food, something you’re so proud of,” said Carol Wong, an educator of Chinese descent.

Everyone agreed.

“In Mexico, it’s all about food,” said Ivette Compean, who moved to the U.S. from Mexico six months ago. “They’re always feeding you. It’s how they tell us they love us.”

“Breaking Bread; Breaking Barriers” was created with an \$85,000 grant from the nonprofit John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. Gupta said he was inspired to seek the funding after reading sociologist

Elijah Anderson’s *The Cosmopolitan Canopy/Race and Civility in Everyday Life*.

Anderson, who lives in Philadelphia and taught at the University of Pennsylvania, found there are certain places in cities where people of different cultures and backgrounds unite without conflict. Reading Terminal Market — a bustling home to butchers and fishmongers, sandwich stalls, and Amish farmers — was one of them.

“It’s a place of refuge and convergence, old and young, black and white, coming together and feeling good around issues of food,” Anderson said. “It’s a place where people get along even though we know there are fault lines. It’s a beautiful thing. It’s inspiring.”

The program hosted one of its most emotional dinners in January, Gupta said. It brought together Syrian refugees and residents deeply rooted in their northeastern Philadelphia neighborhood. The Syrian contributions included falafel and hummus. The American offerings were blackened catfish and collard greens.

During the meal, held a few days after the announcement of President Donald Trump’s original travel ban that included Syrian refugees, the refugees shared stories of their lost homes and changed lives.

At evening’s end, Gupta said, one of the refugees — a woman in her 50s who had been quiet during the meal — stood up and shared her thoughts with the help of an interpreter.

“I thought this evening was just going to be about food,” she said. “It turns out it was about unity.”



RECORD-SETTING ICHIRO. Center fielder Ichiro Suzuki of the Miami Marlins catches a sacrifice fly during a Major League Baseball game in Miami. Manager Don Mattingly made out the lineup for Miami unaware he was making Ichiro the oldest player to start a game in center field since at least 1900. (AP Photo/Lynne Sladky)

Ichiro Suzuki, 43, becomes oldest starting center field

MIAMI (AP) — Manager Don Mattingly made out the lineup for the Miami Marlins unaware he was making Ichiro Suzuki the oldest player to start a game in center field in Major League Baseball since at least 1900.

“He doesn’t play like that,” said Mattingly, who learned of the achievement after the game last month.

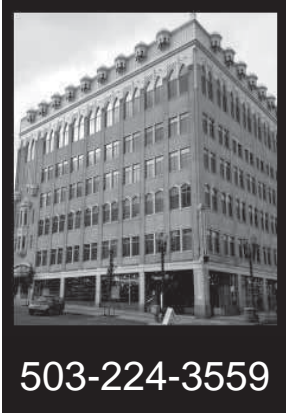
When the 43-year-old started in Miami’s 4-2 win over the Chicago Cubs, he surpassed the record held by Hall of Famer Rickey Henderson, who was a month younger when he started in center in 2002 for the Boston Red Sox.

Ichiro went 0 for 4, dropping his average to .200, but reached on an error and scored in the first inning, and had four putouts in center. He has played in 63 games this season, mostly as a pinch hitter.

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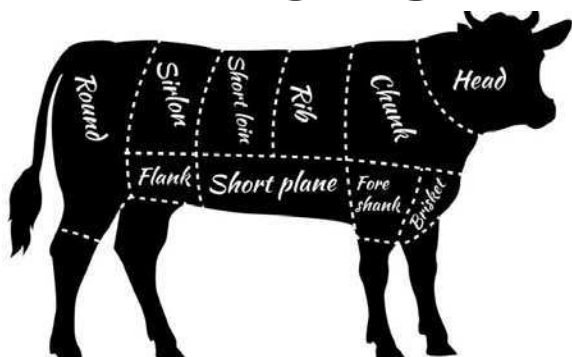
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After U.K. handover, Hong Kong in uneasy transition

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national flags or a giant ad for mainland liquor loom over the city in some photos. Some British-era icons haven’t faded over time, like a justice statue over the law courts, while others show what has disappeared, like the spot on the wall of the City Hall building where the colonial insignia used to hang.

Associated Press writer Kelvin Chan contributed to this report.

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Oregon OSHA has a variety of resources available to help provide a safe place to work. Workers have the ability to file a confidential complaint about unsafe working conditions. Other services include:

Consultation

A free, confidential service to employers, which provides an assessment of on-site hazards.

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Safety and health workshops are offered at locations statewide and online.

Resource Center

Videos can be loaned out to employers and returned for just the cost of shipping. Publications are available in Spanish and other languages.

Contact Oregon OSHA at 1-800-922-2689 for more information, or find us on the web at www.orosha.org.

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