



Larry Janes' neighbors on Lathers Street in Livonia show off the dishes they brought to the annual block party recently. There were family casseroles, zucchini muffins, fruit salads, taco salads, meatballs and Kentucky butter cake. The party, originally scheduled for a few hours, lasted into the evening.

—STEVE FECHT/staff photographer

Perfect recipe for a summer day

By Larry Janes
staff writer

THE RECIPE was simple. Start with a mixture of cheerful neighbors and 2 dozen kids. Mix in plates of appetizers, bowls of salads, a combination of casseroles and hordes of desserts.

Pour in a couple of kegs of beer, wine, soft drinks and about 5 gallons of lemonade. Top it all off with a gorgeous Sunday afternoon and evening and what do you get? The Lathers Street Block Party.

And a party it was. Block parties were invented a long time ago, way back when neighbors had to hitch up the horses to the buggy and journey down a dirt road to help raise a barn, hoist a beam or celebrate a harvest. Today, block parties are becoming the fashionable way to meet new neighbors and rekindle friendships, many of which have endured two, three and four decades.

This year's Lathers Street Block Party in Livonia was no different. Big Wheels, trikes and bikes replaced the horses. Patio umbrellas and picnic tables were scattered about, each brimming with old and young at heart.

FOLKS YOUNG and old tried their skills at old-fashioned games like sack races and water-balloon tosses. Youngsters were rewarded with small gifts of bubbles, stickers and coloring books. Those a bit older were rewarded with tales of who was the first to build on the block, sprinkled with memories of how it used to be way back when the Ira Wilson dairy farm still encompassed what is now the Wilson Acres Subdivision — long before rows of neatly

groomed and well-built three-bedroom brick ranches filled the area.

The block party was originally scheduled to last a few hours, but residents stayed well into the night, enjoying a great summer's eve under the stars. This special party even found the neighbors welcoming back old friends and neighbors who had recently moved away. As I walked from group to group, I could overhear memories of when and how the first oak trees, now towering over the homes, were planted and nursed into the mammoths of today.

Ah, but the common bond that seemed to bring young and old together — as it has in the past and still does — was the endless array of great food that filled the tabletops. Trays of hot Spanakopita (spinach phyllo appetizers) and bowls of munchies were passed. The beer flowed about as fast as the appetizers.

After the kids worked up a hearty appetite, hot dogs were thrown on the grill, and just before the dinner bell rang, everyone raised plates of goodies and cups of cheer for the annual group mugshot. A series of pictures was taken (to ensure that hopefully no one had their eyes closed). Then a flurry of activity took place as each participant removed the foil or plastic wrap that covered their homemade treasures.

When all the kids were fed, the adults sat down. Between mouthfuls, you could hear nothing but raves about, "Who made the meatloaf?" and, "How can I get a recipe for the poppy seed bread?" Plates were brimming with the family casseroles, zucchini muffins, fruit salads, taco salads, meatballs and Kentucky butter cake. Needless to say, no one needed to be coaxed to return for seconds.



Larry Janes, with help from Christopher Don, 4 (left), and Jeffrey Janes, 2, starts grilling hot dogs on the big kettle barbecue. Children and grownups alike enjoyed getting together with their neighbors as well as some friends who used to live on the block.

Spinach pie whets partytime appetites

WIL AND PATTY KREITMEYER'S
SPANAKOPITA PHYLLLO
APPETIZERS

2 bunches green onions (whites only)
chopped
3 cloves garlic
3 (10-ounce) packages frozen spinach, defrosted
¼ cup lemon juice
tops of the green onions chopped

3 eggs
16 ounces ricotta cheese
8 ounces feta cheese, crumbled
2 teaspoons salt
2 teaspoons paprika
1 pound phyllo dough (cut into strips)

Place a small amount of oil in a skillet and sauté the whites of the green onions with the garlic till soft.

AFTER EVERYONE settled down, plates of homemade "turtles" and Hello Dolly Bars were proudly displayed (even though Diane and Frank dropped a few), and the kids were treated with a visit from the Penguin Ice Cream lady. (I'm sure we helped make her quota for the evening.)

After an occasional belch and loosening of a belt buckle, it was time for the adults to try their skill at the water balloon toss and sack races. Those who lost the water balloon toss were grateful for the cool dousing as the sun began to set and four more cases of beer were brought out for the adults — all this while the kids listened to stories and played lawn games.

After a fun afternoon of food and frolic, those with little kids rounded up their Big Wheels and bikes and were observed stopping off for a quick nightcap at other homes down the block. Those who stuck around continued to party hearty, occasionally breaking the ranks to pick up some trash or stow a few empanees.

By the time the evening ended, there was nary a piece of trash to be found. What was left over was a box-

ful of potholders and Tupperware lids, some still waiting to be claimed as this article goes to press. Even more important, however, than the leftover lids and empty kegs was the feeling of camaraderie and friendship.

Yours truly went out the next morning to survey the yard before a welcome sprinkling of rain, and the feeling of warmth and enjoyment by all who attended was still prevalent. The barbecue has been long since been put away, the lawn chairs folded and stashed neatly in the garage, but the cheerful waves from new-found neighbors and smiles from friends on the block can still be felt. And they will be felt for a long time to come.

SO WHEN WAS was the last time you gathered with your friends and neighbors for a little fun and reminiscing?

There's still a lot of summer left, you have nothing to lose and many friendships to gain. "What would I bring?" you ask. Here's a smattering of recipes supplied by the folks on Lathers street. All the recipes have been tested and approved by the hearty partiers on Lathers.

MARY AND TONY RICCI'S
ZUCCHINI-RAISIN BRAN MUFFINS

3 cups flour
2 cups sugar
1 cup oil

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He's not beefing about tender steak

Not being a big fancier of beef, I can count on one hand the number of times I've eaten steak in the last year.

Now bear in mind, I'm no Cybill Shepherd so when I was invited to lunch last week at MacKinnon's of Northville to try a few steaks and meet cattle rancher Mel Coleman, the founder and president of Coleman's Natural Beef, I accepted with eyebrows raised, ready to publicly announce that I could not noticeably discern Coleman's Natural Beef from regular beef. (Remember Shepherd's role toting beef, and then a magazine announcing that she never eats the stuff?)

As they say down on the ranch, "Boy, was I wrong on that one!" So in walks Mel Coleman, fresh from a stint on the J.P. McCarthy show, praising his natural beef, followed by a marketing rep from Allied Provision, the sole wholesale supplier of Coleman's beef to this area. Mel was decked out in typical (?) cattleman's duds, complete with a 10-gallon hat, western-cut shirt with the Coleman brand, Levi dress slacks and cowboy boots.

OTHER DINERS, with their initial looks and glances, may have

taste buds
chef Larry
Janes



been wondering if Coleman left his horse hitched to the big clock in the center of downtown Northville. I received a handshake that would have brought Mike Tyson to his knees, definite proof of his fourth-generation cattle-ranching background.

Seems that Coleman has been cattle ranching on "just a little backyard ranch of 350,000 acres" 31 miles east of the Continental Divide in a little town called Saguache, Colo., all his life, just like his peppy dad and his grandpa before him.

Coleman can be credited by cattle industry executives and food retailers with starting an important trend in cattle production that

will definitely restore consumers' confidence in beef as a healthy food. Seems that Coleman, back in 1978, started what is today the nation's largest production of meat raised without drugs, hormones, antibiotics, growth stimulants or other chemical substances.

As Coleman says himself, "diddly squat is added to the cattle before butchering."

"Alright, Mel, tell me honestly," I said, while downing my salad and anticipating just another broiled steak. "What do you do when your cattle get sick and they have to be treated?"

"We seclude 'em, treat 'em and sell them to other ranchers" was his reply. "Our families didn't believe much in medicine, our mother said she'd rather pay the grocer than the doctor. We were the same with the cattle."

JUST THEN, the waitress brought us our steaks. I thought it real interesting that Coleman opted for a club sandwich while the

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