



Art by Meghan Ketcham.

More Than Just Turkey

Students and teachers share unique Thanksgiving traditions

CALVIN LEE
 Reporter

The table is set, the turkey is cut, and the family starts to feast on gigantic proportions of festive homemade dishes. As the evening goes on, distant family members reconnect over food, games, and football. This is a typical American Thanksgiving tradition that many people love dearly. However, for some people, Thanksgiving is more than just stuffing themselves full of turkey and watching the Detroit Lions or Dallas Cowboys get demolished. They have unique traditions that make their Thanksgiving like no other.

“We have an inflatable turkey that we fly from our flagpole,” teacher Courtney Rager said. “Before we eat dinner we go out and salute the turkey. We also have a turkey hat that everyone passes around and wears.”

Rager is just one of many people at BV West who have ‘non-traditional’ celebrations.

“Being Iranian makes it different,” sophomore Paris Saeedipour said. “We watch Iranian movies. We have slightly different food too.”

Thanksgiving food is often very different from family to family. Besides the typical offering of turkey, pie, potatoes, gravy, and stuffing, many people have their own specialty dishes. Some of these dishes can themselves become traditions.

“We have a plethora of pumpkin flavored things, I usually make homemade pumpkin spice lattes,” Rager said. “We cook all day long. Before we deep-fry the turkey, we raid the kitchen and deep-fry anything we can find. Those are snacks throughout the day. There is one person who deep-fries everything, and they have to wear these big white rubber gloves and an old hockey

mask covered in tin foil.”

Outside of the American staple of deep-fried everything, some families choose to indulge in ethnic food on Thanksgiving.

“Our food is different,” Saeedipour said. “We have the turkey and mashed potatoes, but while most people have things like pumpkin pie, we don’t have that. We usually have Iranian pastries. There’s also this marshmallow jello dessert we have every year. Without it, the party is not complete.”

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Although the food is a very important part of celebrating Thanksgiving, the people are even more important to both Rager and Saeedipour.

“All my cousins come home from college,” Saeedipour said. “We go to my uncle’s house and almost my whole family from my dad’s side is there.”

Although it is very common to have a family-only party, Rager has adopted an unusual tradition of taking in anyone and everyone for her party.

“We usually end up at my mom’s house,” Rager said. “We have my mom and dad, all five of my sisters, another family that comes over, my grandma, my grandma’s neighbor, one or two college friends, my uncle, some of my step dad’s friends, and any random people who don’t have anywhere to go. I like that our

family isn’t just our bloodline. Anybody is welcome as family on Thanksgiving.”

Rager and Saeedipour both enjoy their Thanksgiving traditions, but some students find that the best way to honor Thanksgiving is by not having a party at all. Although most Americans celebrate Thanksgiving, a growing number of people choose not to participate in the holiday.

“My family really doesn’t celebrate it,” junior Omar Khan said. “We try to treat every day as Thanksgiving. It’s as simple as praying every day or giving back to the community.”

This philosophy ties into the purpose of Thanksgiving, reflecting on what one has and sharing that happiness. Although Khan does not have a celebration, he does see how Thanksgiving can be beneficial.

“I do believe that Thanksgiving serves a purpose by bringing families together, and sometimes I use Thanksgiving break to reconnect with my family,” Khan said. “I just don’t really feel the need to have a day for Thanksgiving. Giving back every day is

more important than a big dinner.”

More and more people, even at BV West, agree with Khan. As the country becomes more racially and ethnically diverse, old traditions have evolved and the trend seems to be headed away from celebrating Thanksgiving. Despite this, Thanksgiving remains a beloved holiday to many.

“We’re all just a happy family,” Saeedipour said. “There’s no stress; I just have fun.”

Whether or not BV West students have a party, they can enjoy the day off school to reflect on the things they have and be thankful for them. If students do choose to celebrate Thanksgiving this Nov., they can look forward to what Rager and Saeedipour agree is their favorite part: the mashed potatoes.



The Rager family men pull a deep-fried turkey out of the turkey-fryer and stab it to drain the excess oil during Thanksgiving 2011. An inflatable turkey is flown from the flagpole. * Claire Rager sports the ceremonial turkey hat; a tradition of the Rager family. An arm-wrestling match occurs later in the day to decide who gets to wear the hat during dinner. * Courtney Rager and Bella Kelly knead the dough to create rolls for Thanksgiving dinner. In addition to turkey, the Ragers make a significant amount of pumpkin flavored foods.

Photos courtesy of Courtney Rager.