

A generational happening

YAKIMA HERALD TRIBUNE

Local History

Sukiyaki Dinner plans are handed down to next in line

WAPATO — From Issei to Yonsei.

Just as customs pass from parent to child, the annual Sukiyaki Dinner has become a tradition that is handed down from one generation to the next.

The 29th annual dinner will be served Sunday from noon to 7 p.m. in the Buddhist Hall, 212 W. Second St., Wapato.

Members of the Yakima Buddhist Church are sponsors.

Ken Inaba, publicity chairman for the dinner, explained that this year's theme revolves around the four generations of Japanese-Americans who have produced the dinner.

"We are celebrating the first four generations in this country — the Issei to the Yonsei," he said.

When the first dinner was served in 1961, the church members who organized it were called Issei, or the first generation of Japanese-Americans to live in the United States.

The tradition, and organizational skills, then passed with time to their children, the Nisei. The grandchildren of the Issei are the Sansei, and the newest generation to help are the Yonsei.

Various generations will be in evidence Sunday, greeting guests, preparing and cooking the meal, serving food, and, finally, cleaning up and washing dishes.

Not only has the yearly fund-raiser become a tradition for the families who organize it, it also has become a tradition to attend for people from all over the Valley; each year approximately 1400 people are served.

In addition to sukiyaki, which combines a soy sauce-flavored assortment of vegetables and beef, the dinner includes Japanese rice, cucumber salad and green tea.

None of the ingredients are precooked; all the food preparation occurs on the day of the dinner when members begin chopping at 6 a.m.

The sukiyaki is cooked in the dining area so that diners may view the preparation.

Nearly 100 people help with the event, some traveling from other Buddhist communities around the state. The participants wear traditional dress — kimonos for the women and girls and happi robes for men and boys.

Dinner chairmen are Mas Wada and Yoshio Hata. Four generations of Hata's family have been involved with the event. His mother, the late Etsu Hata, was one of the originators of the dinner; her grandson, Dean Hata, and Dean's son, Curtis, now help Yoshio carry on the tradition.

Tickets, which cost \$7 for adults and \$4 for children, are being sold at various businesses in the Valley and will be available at the door.

Monies raised by the dinner go toward maintaining the gymnasium in the Buddhist Hall for community events.