

HISTORY OF THE GLOBAL GOURMETS

Alias The Newcomers' International Cooking Group

None of us knows when our monthly dinner group started, but it was going strong by the '80's. Interest in cuisines beyond the typical American repast had grown in recent years, but there were not yet the plethora of restaurants featuring tastes and fusions from all over the world that we currently enjoy in Ann Arbor. Grocery stores carrying unusual ingredients and international items were few and far between. There were just a few "ethnic" food stores, and one small but reliable source of odd food items, Big Ten Party Store (whose space is now home to Morgan & York). Even Zingerman's deli did not have the variety of interesting things that it does today.

The FWC Newcomers' International Cooking Group formed to provide unique cooking and eating experiences, and as a source of fellowship among faculty members and couples from many different departments. Originally, we had in common our relative newness to Ann Arbor, our and/or our spouses' jobs as faculty members, and our love of amazing food. In the 1980's, remember that we had basically no Internet, no email, and few home copiers. For each month's dinner, two or three women would meet in advance to plan the menu for the chosen nationality or theme. With no Internet as a source, we used library books, privately owned cookbooks and recipe boxes to find recipes. The planners would choose the menu, copy or type up the recipes, take the compilation to a copy store, and then distribute the recipes to those attending each dinner.

Planners had to call group members on the telephone to see who was coming each time. Sometimes we had pre-dinner meetings with menu samples or technique demos. At that time, six to ten people would meet at someone's house each month, so there were dinners at several houses at the same time. Each person or couple might prepare 2 or 3 dishes.

Eventually, we started having everyone meet at one house for each dinner, and attendance could range from 8-10 to a couple of dozen people. Planning is now much simplified by the abundance of recipes online, and by the ability to communicate by email. With so many attending, each person or couple normally makes just one dish. We still strive to use ingredients that are authentic to the cuisine being prepared, and that is much easier to do now, too. But from the early days to the present, we have always had interesting and delicious meals to look forward to each month. Besides having recipes from a multitude of different countries, from Turkey to Malaysia to Sweden to Brazil, we've had unique menus such as the color green menu, the deconstructed menu, the honey menu, the Axis of Evil menu, Babette's Feast, the chocolate menu, and the Dickens Christmas, complete with fat goose. And in addition to satisfying our food appetites, enduring friendships beyond the dinner table have grown out of our gatherings.

Recently renamed "Global Gourmets", many of us are not newcomers to Ann Arbor at all anymore, but we continue to enjoy welcoming folks who are new to UM or just to the Global Gourmets. Whatever the menu, whether the recipes

are complex or simple, whether it features exotic or more familiar fare, we never fail to come away with the thought, “What delicious food, and what interesting and friendly people. We’re so lucky to live in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and be part of this wonderful group within the UM community.”