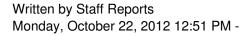
Festival chicken fryers are 'hot'



BY NANCY SPENCER

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DELPHOS — Who doesn't love the smell of fried chicken in the morning? Wait. In the morning? Yes. The aroma of fragrant fried chicken can be smelled for blocks on Saturday and Sunday of St. John's Parish Fall Festival.



Janet Rode, back, and Dottie Backus fry chicken Sunday morning. Their efforts will fill platters and carry-out containers during the second day of St. John's Parish Fall Festival.

The chicken fryers get up before the crack of dawn and are hard at work filling tubs with their crispy fare that will be packed in roasters and then baked.

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Written by Staff Reports Monday, October 22, 2012 12:51 PM -

The volunteers are recruited through family affiliations and some, like Carlene Gerdeman, got a phone call for help one year and the rest is history.

"I got started with the festival chicken after receiving a phone call from a lady who was sick. I took her place and I've been here ever since," Gerdeman said.

Like most festival jobs, from then on, it becomes a family affair.

"My girls started helping with festival when they were in junior high and now we have the whole family up here," Gerdeman added. "We have everyone from kids to grandkids to in-laws. That's how it happens. You volunteer and then talk everyone else in the family into doing it."

Sue (Gerdeman) Wiseman started helping with the festival in kindergarten. She married and moved away but returns each year.

"I love helping with the festival and I get to spend the day with my sister, Sarah," she said.

Roger (Missy) Gerdeman and their son, Keaton, also help.

Jerry Backus and his crew also have a history with festival chicken. Backus' mom, Leona Backus, was head cook at St. John's for 30 years, so the family's progression to helping in the kitchen during festival was natural. Jerry, his wife, Dottie, and their children also man iron skillets during festival.

The chicken fryers are easy to spot; they're all wearing "Chicken Fryers are Hot" T-shirts. Another clue are the smudges of flour on faces.

And by the way, if you visit the kitchen on Saturday or Sunday morning during festival, watch

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your back.