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It's fellowship and soul food on NKU menu

Festival aims to bring university, community more closely together

By Howard McEwen
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HIGHLAND HEIGHTS - Greens, cornbread and black-eyed peas. Good food and conversation will be at the center of Soul Food Fest Part One, 5-7 p.m. today at Northern Kentucky University's University Center Ballroom.

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"The purpose of doing this program is to bring the NKU community together for fellowship and home cooking. Being that many students do not have the opportunity to go home and eat home cooking, we decided to bring it to them," said Rhonda Sneed, office coordinator for NKU's Office of African-American Student Affairs, host of the fest.

Soul food is a style of cooking passed down over generations of African-Americans. Favorite dishes include fried fish, homemade macaroni and cheese, greens, corn bread, black-eyed peas, green beans, sweet potatoes and fried okra.

"African-Americans have a certain finesse to how they prepare, season and cook their meals that to me is on a totally different level from other cultures," said Rensha Reeder of Black United Students.

Since the era of slavery, fellowship and community has always been a hallmark of soul food.

"In slavery times, slaves would get together and bring a dish to the meal. The idea was: 'We are going through hard times; but if we each bring something, we can have a whole meal and enjoy fellowship amongst one another,'" Reeder said.

For Marchelle Crawford, it is an opportunity for "a big, home-cooked meal away from home" and a time to "enjoy the laughter and conversation while eating."

For Reeder, the event is a way to connect with her heritage.

"Soul food and the history behind it is one that is passed down through many, many generations of African-Americans. The soul food fest is a tradition to remember the traditions of our ancestors," she said.

Mark Shanley, vice president of student affairs, says he uses the event to connect with students.

"It's a good way for me to talk with students, listen to what they're up to, and have a good time over good food," he said.

"I lived and worked in South Carolina for 13 years and learned to love soul food, especially fried chicken."

The New Unity Steppers of New Unity Church of God of Cincinnati will provide entertainment. Soul Food Fest Part Two will take place in February during Black History Month.

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