



Gina Wautier Making Belgian Pies

## feature

“Belgian pie is so distinct ... It is a novelty and there is a certain art to it,” Wautier said. “I learned it from my mother and she learned it from her mother. Ours is distinct because there is more topping than filling. We also have a very thin crust so you taste more of the filling than the dough.”

Another daunting detail is the sheer number of pies made at one time. The smallest recipe Wautier has makes a dozen, although she prefers to bake them in several batches of 20. Wautier begins making the fillings the night before and then spends the entire next day baking. For last year’s Kermis Celebration, Wautier and a few helpers baked up 130 pies — and sold them all. This year, she plans to sell the pie by the slice so everyone can get a taste. Special orders will be taken for whole pies ready for the following weekend.

When asked why the pies are made in such quantity, Wautier gave her best observation. “How far do one or two pies go when you have a house full of company and everyone wants to try a piece of each?” Wautier offered. “Besides, you can’t try just one of them, of course.”

That said, Wautier recommends arriving at the Kermis Celebration early, as food will be served until it is gone, and even though they are doubling everything the good eats ran out well before the end last year — although nothing less would be expected of good Belgian cooking. En so?

*The Family Centers of Door County and the Peninsula Belgian American Club are hosting the third annual Belgian Kermis Celebration from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Sunday, Sept. 12 at Southern Door Family Center building, 1400 County Road DK in Brussels. Food, live music, kids’ activities. For more information on this celebration, Belgian pie demonstrations or other fun family activities, call (920) 825-1430 or visit [www.familycentersdc.com](http://www.familycentersdc.com).*

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# Kermis

Celebrating the harvest with booyah and Belgian pie

**HARVEST TIME AND THANKSGIVING** may conjure up thoughts of a November holiday, but in Southern Door County and other towns of the Belgian Settlement in adjacent counties, Kermis is the traditional harvest celebration.

Kermis, also known in Belgium as “Kirk-Messe” or Church Mass, refers to the religious celebration held at the local church, followed by feasting at the nearest tavern or relative’s home.

The first Kermis was held in Rosiere, a small town straddling the county line, on the same Sunday its Belgium sister-city was holding its own celebration. Since then, a Kermis rotation was established, beginning the last Sunday in August in Lincoln, and then moving on consecutive Sundays to Brussels and Namur, Rosiere and Champion, Dykesville, San Savour and Tonet, Duvall and Thiry Daems, Misere and Casco, and finally, Forestville.

In its prime, the Kermis celebration lasted three days, including dancing, card games, and carnival-type festivities. More recently, it is common to find local taverns hosting smaller Kermis celebrations.

Kermis is experiencing renewed interest with a little help from the Family Centers of Door County. With its third annual Kermis Celebration held on September 12, the nonprofit agency is doing its part to teach the area customs to a younger generation.

“We believe it is important to pass along our heritage to others, and hosting this event with the Peninsula Belgian American Club is a way to expose the younger generation to the traditions of the Belgian people — Kermis being one of them,” Family Centers’ Executive Director Gina Wautier said.

Included on the menu are two crowd-pleasing favorites and must haves for any Belgian celebration: chicken booyah — a hearty stew-like version of chicken soup — and Belgian pies.

Belgian pies are unlike any other pie known to man. Light, sweet yeast dough crust is topped with a choice of traditional fillings — ground prunes, apple, or sour cream raisin and topped with a baked-cheese filling — or creamy rice pudding served with whipped cream. The pie is preferably eaten by hand and local tavern owners would give away just as many free slices of Belgian pie as glasses of beer on Kermis — a traditional pairing.

While eating a slice of Belgian pie is an easy task, making them is quite another.

Story by Pamela Parks