

Thankspiggin'

My second day as an official resident of St. John, I was sitting at the bar at

turkey made out of a painted basketball and a flying pig suspended from the rafters.

Ken the architect, a.k.a. Long-Haired Ken (nobody uses last names in Coral Bay) started Thankspigging four years ago for "people who had no place to go." As a newcomer to the island a few years earlier, he knew what it was like to spend Thanksgiving alone.

The first annual Thankspigging was held in Ken's home. He provided the pig, mashed potatoes and beer, and asked the guests to bring the rest.

The main dish was pig instead of turkey because it was cheap, and could feed a lot of people. Good thing. Eighty showed up.

The next year 120 people came to dinner. Thankspigging had outgrown Ken's home and last year moved to Skinny Legs. The restaurant, closed for the day, donated the space and drinks. Now more than 200 people consider Thankspigging their Thanksgiving tradition.

The feast has grown, too. In addition to the traditional turkeys, pound after pound of potatoes, stuffing, cranberry relish, sweet potato casseroles and pumpkin pies crowding the bar, there was also sushi, deep fried turkey (a new addition to the menu last year) and two huge pigs

instead of one. And the talk of this year's dinner: Alligator.

"Ten pounds of gator tail. It's a Florida boy," Ken said, explaining how alligator made its way onto the menu. "Swamp cabbage. It's gator, all three kinds of peppers (green, yellow and red), BBQ onions and garlic."

Ken and Sherry, his second in command, joked that the event was Coral Bay's version of The Flavors of St. John, the upscale fundraiser held at the Westin earlier this month and featuring most of Cruz Bay's finest restaurants. "It's the Flavors of Coral Bay," said Sherry.

Ken still provides the pigs and potatoes and guests do the rest. Barbara from Colorful Corner was helping with the turkeys, walking around with a meat thermometer in her pocket. Tom barely got through the door before people started grabbing his jalapeno peppers. Cary, a South Carolina transplant who had been living on island for only three weeks, made his grandmother's turkey dressing, and was thankful to have a place to go.

Everybody is asked to bring a dish, but no one is turned away. All of the food is donated in one way or another. The meal is free for all who want to eat.

"That's Coral Bay. We're very tight here," explained one guest.

Some guests who couldn't contribute in past years now

bring something with them. Ken says that's one of the best parts.

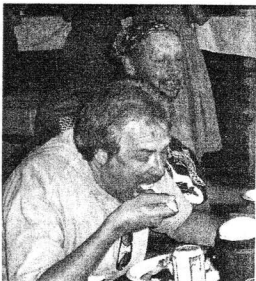
The line for dinner stretched all around the restaurant and out the door. The sushi and swamp cabbage were the first to go. Diners included familiar local faces, families, some dogs, a couple from

Cruz Bay (no one's turned away. Piggyback and even a few tourists (at least everyone assumed they were tourists since no one knew who they were).

There are never any leftovers, and everyone helps clean up. (Last year, Ken said, Skinny's owners told him the locals did a better job cleaning up than their staff.) After dinner there's music. Anything goes, as long as it's not amplified. The only complaint was about the color's of this year's Thankspigging T-shirt... and that was from the guy who designed them.

Late Thanksgiving night, I ran into another Coral Bay resident at Voyages who told me he had dropped off three types of croissant at Thankspigging, but hadn't had any dinner himself. He

By Margie Smith



Ken, the founder of Thankspiggin'

Skiny Legs in Coral Bay with my roommate, chatting up the bartender. We covered the basics—where are you from, what brought you here, etc.—then she asked if we had any family in Coral Bay. When we told her no, she responded, "Well then, you are cordially invited to Thankspigging."

As newcomers to the island, the name alone conjured up all sorts of intriguing images. A wild party. Some traditional West Indian pig-roasting Thanksgiving tradition. A chance to meet our new neighbors. Mostly it felt good to have an invitation for a day that would have left us feeling a little lonely and homesick.

Thanksgiving morning started with a swim at a friend's home on the East End. 85 degrees and crystal clear skies and a view that stretched for miles in all directions. This was a holiday tradition I could get used to.

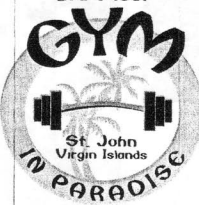
I arrived at Thankspigging just in time to see a full roasted pig being sliced down the middle, head and all. This was the first clue (actually, the second, if you're counting the name) that this would not be grandma's traditional turkey dinner.

By 5 p.m. the party was in full swing. Guests were mingling and football was on TV. The bar at Skinny Legs was transformed into a buffet, and the restaurant was festive with Thanksgiving decorations, including a

called food "the best barrier breaker" and said he was just happy to help out. He figured he'd go home and make a salami sandwich.

It is an interesting place, where people don't want to be identified, even for their good deeds. And while there are many things for which to be thankful here—sea and sun and so much natural beauty—perhaps none is more important than good food prepared by caring hands and people to share it with on a day that could leave you feeling a little adrift, even if you are living in paradise.

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