A Very Gaggle Thanksgiving

Ron Hansen [00:00:00] Hello, Google listeners, this is your host, Ron Hansen.

Mary Jo Pitzl [00:00:04] And I'm Mary Jo Pitzl.

Ron Hansen [00:00:05] It's the day before Thanksgiving. And we wanted to bring you a special holiday treat, Gaggle style.

Mary Jo Pitzl [00:00:12] That's right. Instead of our usual political deep dives, we wanted to share a different side of your local leaders and politicians. So today we get their positions on Thanksgiving traditions, memories and recipes.

Ron Hansen [00:00:26] To start with, we have Mesa Mayor John Giles, who recently joined us in the studio for an upcoming episode. He shared with us his plans for Turkey Day.

John Giles [00:00:38] My wife and I were just talking yesterday about how Thanksgiving is our favorite holiday. We love Christmas, but Christmas, there's just too much stress, right? There's too many things to get done. And it's just too long and too complicated. And Thanksgiving is, thankfully no pun intended, short and sweet, and it focuses on non-material things and on people. Food is obviously a big part of our tradition, and I'm really excited this year. Yesterday, someone gave me a new recipe for a turkey that I'm going to try. My wife always allows me to smoke a turkey. That's my favorite. But there's a new Gordon Ramsay recipe I'm trying out this year for the turkey that's going to be inside. And it involves, you know, as you might imagine, stuffing a lot of butter under the skin of the turkey. But then you put strips of bacon on top of the turkey when you cook it and bacon plus anything equals good, right? So I'm excited and this is not a secret, but I have downloaded on my devices this Gordon Ramsay YouTube video of, you know, all the normal stuff you do to a turkey. But then this secret sauce of laying Bacon strips on top of the turkey. So give it a try. I'm going to try it this year. I'm really excited.

Becky Daggett [00:01:59] Hello, This is Flagstaff Mayor Becky Daggett. And the most important thing to me on Thanksgiving is to spend some time in nature with my dogs. Reviewing what I'm thankful for. So no matter what else I'm doing on Thanksgiving Day, I have to stop and take some time in nature and just think about all the good things in my life. And because it's usually around my birthday, I like to volunteer somewhere as another expression of my gratitude. I will often do that as well. So happy Thanksgiving, Arizona.

Lela Alston [00:02:35] Our family tradition is to make turkey cookies and distribute them to the neighbors. We started this when my daughter's boys were very young. They are young adults now, but the tradition continues. We distribute them to the neighbors and the family enjoys doing it and the neighbors enjoy receiving them. We always get really nice responses, and it's nice to have that special little turkey sugar cookie treat covered with frosting and candy corn on Thanksgiving Day. Happy Thanksgiving.

Ron Hansen [00:03:18] That was State Senator Lela Alston, a Democrat from Phoenix and caucus chair for the Senate Minority. Also from that chamber is Senate Minority Leader Mitzi Epstein, who admits she doesn't need anything fancy for Thanksgiving. She prefers to leave the cooking to the chefs in her family, but her analytical background allows her to effectively oversee the operations.
Mitzi Epstein [00:03:41] I'm a great delegator, so. But my favorite is just plain. A plain old roasted sweet potato is the best thing in the whole world. You know, my family is now dispersed over a couple of coasts and in Arizona. But we do have a family tradition of meeting at my husband's mother's house where my son, who's in New York and my son who's in Boston, come up. Aunts and uncles and in-laws all come in and we have a great big, wonderful family Thanksgiving with at least 3 or 4 dogs. And it's a great, wonderful celebration. I think the fact that America has this tradition of Thanksgiving is just a beautiful thing that, you know, let's be sure to take four full days to be thankful.

Nancy Gutierrez [00:04:29] Hi, this is Representative Nancy Gutierrez. I represent LD 18, in Tucson, Arizona. And when I think about Thanksgiving, I think about sauerkraut. And that might seem strange to most people. But my grandmother, Lorraine Musha, who we called Tutu, was German, and that was her tradition to have sauerkraut that she would make all day with some pork and apples in it to make it nice and sweet and flavorful. And we would have that every single Thanksgiving dinner. And everyone who came to our Thanksgiving dinner, friends or family, was in no uncertain terms, told that they needed to try the sauerkraut. Everyone must have sauerkraut on their plate. So my children and my husband have been trained that we have sauerkraut at Thanksgiving and we still continue this tradition, although we take an easier way out with canned sauerkraut. Now it's a different tradition, but it makes me think of Tutu. I hope you all have a wonderful Thanksgiving.

Mary Jo Pitzl [00:05:38] Republican State Senator Shawnna Bolick of District 2 in North Phoenix loves this time of year. She and her husband, State Supreme Court Justice Clint Bolick, have a special memory that really makes Thanksgiving nostalgic.

Shawnna Bolick [00:05:55] Thanksgiving is one of our family's favorite times of the year. When my husband and I got married more than 23 years ago, we received a Thanksgiving themed cookbook as a wedding present. And I make a point to reference in each and every year. It's called a "Williams-Sonoma Kitchen Library: Thanksgiving Festive Recipes for the Holiday Table." I actually had to pull it out to see exactly what the title was. In order to do this podcast. You know, over the years, I have learned to, I don't know, make mistakes when it comes to holiday cooking. But the last few years I decided to keep a to do list rate inside the cover of my cookbook so I can plot out my week leading up to Thanksgiving. And it starts on Tuesday and obviously Sunday and over the weekend. I try to go out and buy the various things that folks have asked me to serve for Thanksgiving. Everything from obviously buying a frozen turkey potentially over the weekend and letting it thaw in our refrigerator throughout the week. I also keep an extra brining bag on hand in the event I decide that I actually want to bring my turkey. And I've never, ever cooked a turkey the same way. I always rotate out our side dishes. I read lots of cookbooks instead of reading books. Sometimes I actually do go and buy various cookbooks that may be recommended to me. I spend a lot of time at second hand bookstores looking for cookbooks, actually for this specific holiday. You know, some people might view Thanksgiving prepping as daunting. I find it very enjoyable and it's a great way to just break out the tasks, starting with your weekend of what you might need to buy Tuesday. I'm looking at my to do list and I have to break it up into making sure that I'm cutting up everything from the celery and onions. I bought a chicken last night so I can make homemade chicken broth. And I do all of this, so I'm not rushing around and waking up at two in the morning on Thanksgiving. I always feel very blessed to have my family around on Thanksgiving, but I feel even more blessed if I have a time to actually go take a hike with them on Thanksgiving Day. I would say one year we hosted about 19 people at our house. Friends brought extended family. They brought their children, they brought things
over that they enjoy sharing with other folks from Thanksgiving, from wine to desserts. And we've even had our kids invite their significant others along with their own families. Our brother in law is a Lutheran pastor and he blesses our meal every single year. And each Thanksgiving, my husband always requests. I make stuffing and gravy. My son always requests that I make homemade rolls and cranberry sauce. This year I actually told my sister in law just to bring a can of cranberry sauce because I think my son's getting tired of me making homemade cranberry sauce and adding maybe something spicy here and there. And our daughter lately has been asking me to make homemade mac and cheese this year. My daughter is also going to be making a Thanksgiving pie of some sort. I hope you and your listeners have a blessed Thanksgiving, and I hope that your turkey is very moist and you are surrounded by friends and family. Have a great Thanksgiving.

Mary Jo Pitzl [00:09:05] From the state legislature to the offices of elections officials. Our next guest takes cooking for others to the next level.

Adrian Fontes [00:09:13] This is Adrian Fontes, Arizona's secretary of state. My Thanksgiving meal plans include deep frying turkeys for friends and family and started over 15 years ago. And a deep fried a turkey and thought it was a bit of a waste of oil. And so we deep fried a bunch of other stuff. And the following year we invited a neighbor to deep fry theirs and it just grew and grew. And last year we did 15 turkeys. I run two 54-quart pots in the backyard with about 35 pounds of oil in each. And we basically run them each on the hour. And friends and family come over and they hang out, get their turkeys fried, and they take them home to their families. So I kind of cook turkeys for a dozen plus homes. And it's a good time. It's a lot of fun.

Gabriella Cázares-Kelly [00:10:08] This is Gabriella Cázares-Kelly, the Pima County recorder. I'm a member of the Tohono O'odham Nation of southern Arizona, and I'm the first Native American to hold a county wide elected seat in Pima County. This year, my family and I are celebrating with two Thanksgivings. The first will be on Thanksgiving Day with my best friend, April and her family on the third of the nation. April will be slow roasting a turkey in a pit underground. I asked for her to assign me something easy, like mashed potatoes or dressing, usually at an autumn Thanksgiving, in addition to all the usual foods like turkey and mashed potatoes and cranberry sauce. It's pretty typical to have cocohito, mun, pan, and chechiment. In English, those foods are red chili, pinto beans, bread and tortillas. Will be playing O'odham Bingo, which is a time to dice game with small prizes. It can get pretty lively. April's home is decorated with beautiful O'odham baskets, some of them hundreds of years old. She also has some amazing paintings from contemporary Native American artists, including herself and her daughter. All the Native American decorations that hang in her home hang there year round. She can tell you the name and tribal affiliation of every artist for every single basket or painting hanging in her home. There won't be any pilgrim decorations, of course. My second Thanksgiving will be at my home with my sister, her sons and grandsons on Saturday. My sister has been working at the Desert Diamond Casino for nearly three decades and never has the actual holiday off. My family cooks a big Thanksgiving dinner. Then we usually sit outside on our patio in perfect Arizona weather and go around the table sharing our things. One year, as I was giving my thanks to my family for supporting me in all of my political efforts, my nephew Mitchell interrupted me by saying, "Auntie, I have something to tell you! I didn't vote. I'm so sorry. I couldn't decide between two terrible choices! I'm so sorry!" There was an audible gasp at the table as everyone looked at one another with wide shocked eyes. Then everyone looked at me, waiting for my response. "Give me back that plate of food, you make me sick!" He was still unsure whether or not I was kidding, as everyone at the table erupted in laughter. But afterwards, he promised it would never happen again. When
your auntie is also the elected official responsible for voter registration and early voting for a whole county, you can't mess around. We always go around the table and say what we're thankful for. Sometimes it's internet memes, a job promotion. It's always family. And we always acknowledge the Wampanoag tribe, which first encountered the Pilgrims. We remind ourselves that they were only recognized by our federal government as an official tribe in 2007, had land held in trust for them by our government, and then in 2018 had it taken away again, as I'm sure you can imagine. It's a complicated day for us Native Americans. I don't speak for my tribe or any of the 22 distinct tribes of Arizona or the 574 federally recognized tribes in the United States. Some Native Americans don't celebrate, or they might attend ceremonies to gather strength and acknowledge the attempted genocide and assimilation of indigenous communities. I see the variety of choices my community makes on how to acknowledge this day on social media, the turkeys, the protests, the traditional foods, the prayers. Some, like my brother, just make a lot of jokes about colonizers and post pilgrim memes all day. My family uses today as an excuse for piecing together, being together in community and relishing in our resilience. We're still here. We've always been here, and we always will be. Happy Thanksgiving.

Ron Hansen [00:14:18] I don't think we could have said it any better ourselves.

Mary Jo Pitzl [00:14:22] It's lovely to hear a different side to our state leaders. Thank you to all who participated. So, Ron, do you have any fun traditions or maybe new traditions for this year?

Ron Hansen [00:14:33] Well, it's an old tradition, but I certainly hope it's a continuation of something that we've not had for a while. And that is the Well, there's an old tradition since this is around my birthday, and it's also when Ohio State plays Michigan. This Ohio State alum is hoping for a nice win in Ann Arbor. Not really Thanksgiving, but boy, I will be grateful for that if I get it. How about you, Mary Jo?

Mary Jo Pitzl [00:15:03] Well, I long ago gave up my Nebraska football Thanksgiving Day tradition. And instead, we always go out for a hike on Thanksgiving out to some remote part of Arizona with turkey sandwiches and cranberry oatmeal bars. And give our thanks for living in a sunshiny state where it's not too hot in November. Very grateful for that.

Ron Hansen [00:15:27] Well, that certainly sounds a lot healthier all the way around.

Mary Jo Pitzl [00:15:32] For our listeners, if you want to check out that Gordon Ramsay recipe that Mayor Giles mentioned, we'll link to it on our website. And we have one more recipe coming from State Representative Leo Biasucci, a Republican representing District 5 in western Arizona. He sent us his recipe for deep fried turkey. We'll also share that on the Web site. Today's episode is edited and produced by Kaely Monahan. Music comes from Universal Production Music.

Ron Hansen [00:16:08] We'll be back next week with our conversation with Mesa Mayor John Giles. Make sure you don't miss it by subscribing to the gaggle wherever you listen. You can follow The Gaggle on social media @azcpodcasts. And I'm at Ronald J. Hansen.

Mary Jo Pitzl [00:16:30] And I'm @ Mary J Pitzl. The Gaggle is an Arizona Republic and azcentral.com production. Thank you again for listening. A very happy Thanksgiving to you all and we'll see you next week.