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By Cliff Bellamy

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DURHAM — David Auerbach of Durham was cutting slices of sourdough country bread and whole wheat bread, both made in his wood-fired bread oven. He made it using flour from Anson Mills, a South Carolina company that uses organically grown grains. Phoebe Lawless was cutting sweet potato pies and putting them into boxes for serving. The sweet potatoes in the pie were donated by Eastern Carolina Organic of Pittsboro.

Both cooks were putting the finishing touches on Slow Food Triangle's second Traditional Southern New Year's Day event, held for the second year at the Golden Belt facility Friday. A traditional Southern New Year's meal means nothing without collards — which chef Marco Shaw cooked, and which several local farms donated — and black-eyed peas served on rice, called Hoppin' John, which Shaw and Lawless also spooned out on serving platters. Diners also sampled local coffee from Counter Culture Coffee of Durham, and some North Carolina beers in a display by 3Cups of Chapel Hill.

One goal of Slow Food Triangle, and the slow food movement, is to make people aware of local agriculture. But the movement also has wider goals, said Mark Overbay of Slow Food Triangle, one of which is preserving foods "as a center of community," he said.

"It's about slowing down to enjoy food together" and making food "a joyful part of life, not just fuel to get you through the day," Overbay said.

This year's meal also was a benefit for a pilot program at E. K. Powe Elementary School to put fresher local food in the school's cafeteria. Overbay said the organization expected to donate \$2,000 from the meal toward that program. Slow Food Triangle will serve as a resource for the project.

The crowd for this year's meal filled up three long tables. Many poured vinegar on their collards, and were obviously savoring Southern food as a joyful part of life. This year's crop of collards are exceptionally sweet, and are full of sap because of the cold weather, said Alex Hitt of Peregrine Farm in Graham, one of the farms that donated the greens.

Peregrine sells chiefly to farmers' markets, and some to Weaver Street Market and local restaurants. In keeping with the slow food philosophy, Hitt's farm delivers either directly to the person who's eating it, or one step away. "I don't think anything travels more than 30 miles from the farm," he said.

The collards and blackeyed peas drew rave reviews. Robin Livingston of Apex said the event was her first. She pronounced the Hoppin' John "very good." She added: "I'm not a big fan of collards, but these are very good." Her children enjoyed an educational table about bread, and an activity table that allowed them to make a bird feeder using a pine cone, peanut butter and bird seed.

Tucker Bartlett, CEO of Scientific Properties, which manages Golden Belt, was dining his first time at the event and gave the meal high praise. Overbay said Slow Food Triangle wants to make the New Year's Day meal an annual tradition, and Bartlett agreed. "I hope so. I think it's a perfect place for it. We had it here last year and hope to have it next year as well."

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