



Stuffed with fun

Fill up on pierogi at this surreal street fest

Northwest Indiana's prosperous industrial days may be gone, but there's still a reason to celebrate: really good pierogi. To bolster community pride, the small town of Whiting (so close to the Illinois/Indiana border that the neighboring town boasts the "Illiana Yacht Club") honors its Eastern European heritage each year with its three-day Pierogi Fest, where the tried and true Polish/Slovak dumplings are fried or steamed with butter, and chock-full of different fillings like meat, cheese, potato, mushroom, berries and apricot.

On the main strip you'll find newly erected "old-fashioned" lampposts just down the street from a grade school and church with a primitive wooden antiabortion sign on the lawn. Farther down the street, amidst dozens of pierogi stands, there will be costumed polka dancers, drunken bystanders, a magic show, carnival games, booths selling pierogi paraphernalia, a beer garden under the pavilion and a John Waters-esque show by the Mr. Pierogi Musicales Players (mostly preteen girls in tights with curled hair and stage makeup, directed and choreographed by the town's drama guru), performing "Whiting, Indiana" to the tune of "Gary, Indiana."

The dumplings come mainly from nearby delis and restaurants in Whiting and Hammond, as well as Hegewisch, Illinois. Those made by the Slovak ladies at St. John Catholic Church are also sold frozen if you need to stock up. The festival's motto is: "We're stuffed with fun." Come for the irony, stay for the food.—*Gretchen Kalwinski*

Pierogi Fest 2005 is Friday 29 through Sunday 31. See Around Town listings.



Ask a... **Social psychologist**

After the London bombings, how is fear affecting the lives of Chicagoans?

Maureen Wang Erber, Northeastern Illinois University

"When used to persuade people, fear is only useful if you have a strategy for avoiding that bad situation. 'This is your brain on drugs,' is supposed to make us fearful. So what's the solution? Not doing drugs. In this case, the fear doesn't really point us in any direction [in terms of] what we can do to eliminate it. But [these bombings] can make us think twice and think about our safety. The news shows that the British are not panicking;

they're taking it in a very practical way. One woman said she [now] brings an extra pair of shoes so she doesn't have to walk home in high heels next time. I think that kind of measured response is having an effect on our response somewhat. But it hasn't hit close to home in Chicago. I think if we saw people checking our bags on the subway, like in New York, that's more immediate."—*Leah Pietrusiak*

What's up with that?

Q What's up with the cop cars parked in that middle lane on State Street downtown?

A In between Wacker Drive and Congress Parkway, an extra lane in the middle of State Street serves as an impromptu parking lot for cops and other city vehicles. Yes, they're allowed to do that. No, you are not. Pat Camden, spokesman for the Chicago Police Department, says officers often use the lane to answer CTA or general calls in the area or to make a delivery. Up until 1996, only emergency vehicles and buses were allowed on this stretch. The city closed the street in 1978 to everything but bus traffic, in the hopes of creating a shopping district that could compete with suburban malls. But the plan backfired—literally.

"The buses created a great deal of exhaust," says Ty Tibling, executive director of the Chicago Loop Alliance. "It became difficult to breathe, and the vitality of the street was really impeded." A number of factors, including



white flight, caused big-name retailers to close their doors starting in the '80s. In the early '90s, the city tried to revamp the area, again using public transportation. This time plans called for a "circulator," a trolley that would run down the center lane delivering passengers to nearby destinations. By the mid-'90s, the plan fell through due to lack of funding. State Street reopened to through-traffic in 1996.—*Noelle Stout*

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