

Children At Beth El Learn How to Celebrate Purim

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WINCHESTER - Children at Beth El Congregation got messy in the kitchen on Sunday while learning about an important Jewish holiday.

Young members of the synagogue, located at 520 Fairmont Ave., made hamentaschen — triangular pastries with a variety of sweet fillings — for the Jewish holiday Purim, which falls on March 23-24.

The children, ages 5 to 14, rolled dough into balls, flattened each ball on a floured surface and pulled up three corners to form a triangle. Jam fillings such as strawberry, raspberry, apricot and prune were then added. Chocolate chips and a traditional poppy seed mixture also were used as fillings.

Jordan Kemelhar, 14, said he had never made hamentaschen before.

“My favorite part is learning how to do it,” he said.

Aliyah Desimone and her twin brother, Dagan, 10, both said their favorite filling was the chocolate chips.

“It’s fun making these,” said Dagan. “I’ve never made these before.”

Synagogue member Robin Millstone said the dough is made from butter, flour, fresh orange zest, sugar, vanilla and eggs. There is no leavening agent added.

The hands-on experience helped children learn more about Purim, a holiday in which Jews commemorate being saved from persecution in the ancient Persian Empire. According to the Book of Esther in the Bible, Haman, a prime minister, convinced King Ahasuerus to kill the Jews. In the end, the Jews were saved by Queen Esther, who was of Jewish descent.

The hamentaschen pastries are triangular in shape to represent Haman’s three-cornered hat and sometimes his ears.

Beth El Congregation usually holds one baking event each year. After a few years of not making hamentaschen at the synagogue, they are bringing it back, Millstone said.

Ellen Zimmerman is president of the synagogue’s sisterhood, which organizes events throughout the year. She said hamentaschen is a sweet treat to enjoy during Purim.

She said another Purim tradition is making gragers — Yiddish for noisemaker — which the children did Sunday using plastic bottles filled with beans and rice. Just for fun, they also made a colorful paper chain that will be used as a decoration in the synagogue.

After making the hamentaschen, the children listened to the Purim story. Whenever Haman was mentioned, they vigorously shook their gragers to blot out his name.

Millstone said the hands-on experience of making hamentaschen is something the children will not easily forget.

“It’s very important to carry on with tradition,” she said. “Without tradition, you have nothing.”

“I never knew what hamentaschen was until today,” said 10-year-old Evan Kemelhar.

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