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Images courtesy The Makers Guild of Maine



### **Third Annual Armenian Picnic**

Searsport Shores Oceanfront Campground, Sunday July 30, 11- 5, 2023

Celebrate Summer with a traditional Armenian Picnic right here on the Midcoast at Searsport Shores Ocean Campground!

Take the campground turn off from Route 1 south of Searsport and discover another world. For the third year running, Maine will be meeting the Middle East for a day of picnicking Armenian style on the shores of Penobscot Bay

The grills will be sizzling with skewers of beef shish kebab threaded with onions, peppers and ripe tomatoes and loshkebab patties spiced with red pepper paste and coriander will be seared and ready for pita sandwiches (a unique to New England version based on the more traditional Lulu Kebab~ sort of an Armenian hamburger).

When you pick up your dinner plate, it will be piled high with fragrant pilaf, a warm chickpea & tomato salad, homemade hummus and fresh greens. Our grandmother's recipes will be used to create the homemade paklava & korabia (Armenian butter cookies) on the dessert plates served with traditional coffee prepared in a jezve over the open flame.

While food takes the center stage at a picnic, music and dancing are key ingredients to understanding the culture. Legendary Oud player, Leo Derderian, and veteran musician, Bob Arzigian (oud/guitar) will be providing traditional Middle Eastern music supported by Hagop Garabedian (keyboard) and Harry Bogosian (dumbeg/percussion) from 11-1 and 3-5 on the center stage. Mr. Derderian has been collecting traditional tunes for 50+ years and will share stories of his adventures in between songs of joy and lament, journeys and village life. Armenian dance expert Carolyn Rapkivian will lead an afternoon session of village/folk dancing lessons for all.

In recognition of the support that Balkan countries, in particular, Poland, lent to the Armenians during the genocide and again now to the Ukrainians, there will be a concert by the new, and highly praised, folk band *Kotwica*. Seven members - including musicians on fiddle, balalaika, button accordion, guitar and string bass - are drawn from across Maine and play music from the Baltic to the Black Sea will perform from 1-3.

Astrig Koltookian Tanguay, who runs the Searsport campground with her husband Steve, first came up with the idea of holding an Armenian picnic three years ago to cheer people up after Covid.

Her thoughts went back to the annual Summer Picnics of her childhood in New Hampshire. “My family originally came from Armenia,” she explains. “They settled in New England mill towns, and every year our local Armenian churches would organize a Summer Picnic. Everybody would be there: grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, neighbors, friends, all the kids. There would be lots of traditional music and dancing, and always the most wonderful, outdoor food.” Such picnics are part of a tradition that goes back to the end of the nineteenth century when Armenians began to flee religious persecution, leaving their villages, farms and orchards to resettle around the globe. Many ended up in America’s industrial towns, crowded into tiny apartments, and working long days in the mills. The annual Summer picnic - often organized by the local Armenian Church - offered a day of glorious freedom in the countryside, time with family and friends, and the chance to keep the customs of the ‘old ‘country alive.

Astrig and Steve decided it was time to bring the warmth and spirit of an Armenian picnic to midcoast Maine. “Think of it as part harvest festival, part dance party. We have this beautiful setting amidst the gardens on Penobscot Bay, wonderful local produce, and Armenians are famous for their hospitality.”

She put out a call for help to family, friends and the Armenian Church and everyone rallied round, sharing recipes, memories and performance ideas. “It was very exciting,” recalls Astrig, “but also nerve wracking. We had no idea if anyone would show up!” The rest, as they say, is history. The event drew so many locals, tourists, and Armenians from far beyond Maine that we ran out of food. “It was so much more popular than we ever expected,” says Astrig, “and we had to promise to do it again.”

Among those who found their way to that first event, and are playing a major role at this year’s picnic are Carolyn Rapkivian, a renowned performer and authority on Armenian Dance, and her husband, David Rapkivian, founder and director of the young Maine folk band, *Kotwica*. They had recently relocated to Bar Harbor from the DC area. Carolyn, who is Armenian, and grew up going to Summer Picnics as a child in Massachusetts, points out that the picnics themselves are an example of the way Armenians, and their ancient culture, have proved remarkably adaptive and resilient over centuries of occupation and displacement. “Look at the village dances” she says. “They go back to pre-Christian times. The woman solo dancer holds her fingers so they look like the head of a gazelle...and the men’s dance known as *kochari* (listed as Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO) represents the movements of goats, jumping and leaping.” It even turns out that America’s Armenian Picnics have helped preserve details and variations of dances that have been lost by communities in other parts of the world.

While Carolyn's current project is collecting and documenting Armenian dances, her husband, David Rapkivian, a musician, dancer and, for fifty years, a professional violin maker is focusing on *Kotwika*. The name means 'anchor' a cultural symbol of freedom, and the repertoire transcends national, political and religious boundaries. They will be performing songs and music from countries between the Baltic and the Black Sea, including Finland, Poland, Ukraine and Greece.

Everybody is welcome here in Searsport, says Astrig. We do hope you'll to join us.

Searsport's Armenian Picnic is being sponsored by several local organizations and small businesses: (1) The Makers Guild of Maine, a local nonprofit that promotes the ongoing value of heritage skills - and making things by hand, or at home, or in the community. (2) The Armenian Cultural Association of Maine, a Portland based nonprofit dedicated to preserving and perpetuating the Armenian culture and heritage in all aspects of life through the enhancement of its language, education, art, music, dance, literature, singing, theater, and sports. (3) Flying Shoes of Belfast a nonprofit dedicated to bolstering the spirited dance and music community of Midcoast Maine.

Admission is free but all are asked to leave their pets and food/drink at home. Food and beverages will be available for purchase throughout the day, but advance booking is strongly recommended as last year's feast sold out fast.

All profits and donations from the event will be donated to Ukrainian Relief efforts.

For more information and to purchase tickets, please visit: [www.makersguildmaine.org/armenian-picnic/](http://www.makersguildmaine.org/armenian-picnic/) or [www.campocean.com](http://www.campocean.com) or call the campground at (207) 548-6059.