



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **CARPATHO-RUSYNS ENJOY RICH EASTER CULINARY TRADITIONS**

**Uniontown, PA** – When people think of Easter, they often think of brightly colored eggs in baskets. But decorated eggs aren't just a whimsical item delivered by the Easter bunny or a fun art project to do with your family. They're also an intricate and important part of some religious celebrations, including those enjoyed by the Carpatho-Rusyn people.

Carpatho-Rusyns come from an area in the Carpathian Mountains in eastern Europe and encompass people from a number of countries in the region, including Poland, Slovakia and Ukraine. According to Bonnie Balas, who organizes the Carpatho-Rusyn festival at St. John Byzantine Catholic Church in Uniontown each fall, they are a people without a true home.

Balas said historically, "different leaders have wanted to take over this region," including the Austro-Hungarian Empire. "Carpatho-Rusyns never really had their own country."

But the people of the region, with their varying ethnic backgrounds, stuck together and developed shared customs, some of which have their own subtle difference. One such custom is the decoration of eggs each Easter.

Balas said the blessing of food following the long Lenten fast is a key part of the Easter celebration in that region of the world, and the eggs, known as pysanky, are a common thread.

"Many of the Slavic groups prepare some form of egg in different styles from their part of the region," she said.

There are different methods of creating the delicate eggs, one of which is the batik, or wax resist, method. That's the method used by Kathy Hillen, who has been teaching classes in pysanky-making at Appalachian Creativity Center in Connellsville.

Hillen explained that when coloring the eggs, "you have to think backwards."

Decoration begins with a white egg and a design, she said. The eggs are not hard-boiled or cooked in any way. In fact, in many cases, the yolk isn't even blown out.

"The old way of thinking is that you don't do that because the egg inside is life," Hillen said.

The coloring process begins with a design, which can be as simple or as detailed as the decorator chooses. Most of the time, the design includes earth-related symbols, such as trees, leaves or animals, all of which hold some type of significance.

"Everything that you want white, you're going to cover with wax," Hillen said, explaining that once covered, the eggs are then dipped in non-edible dyes.

Hillen said the dyeing process usually begins with yellow, and then colors gradually get darker, until the final color - typically a dark purple, black or dark red - is applied. Each part of the egg that isn't meant to be dyed a certain color is covered in wax before dipping in that hue.

Once all the dyes have been applied, Hillen said the next step is to hold the wax-covered egg next to a flame, but not in it, to melt the wax.

"It will get shiny, and you know the wax is melted," Hillen said. "As you wipe the wax off, you see the colors just come to life."

Though pysanky is the most famous of the region's Easter foods, it is far from the only one. Balas said Carpatho-Rusyns traditionally prepare a number of foods which are packed into baskets to be blessed at church and then eaten at the Easter dinner. Among them is paska, a sweet yeast bread made with eggs and butter. The round loaves are typically decorated with braiding on the crust.

Balas said the bread represents Jesus, the Living Bread. Other foods also have symbolic significance. Ham, veal, pork and lamb are symbolic of Jesus' role as the "sacrificial lamb," while dairy products such as butter and cheese and cooked eggs represent prosperity and peace. Condiments such as salt and horseradish with grated red beets, symbolizing the passion of Christ, also are included in the baskets.

Kielbasa and bacon also might be placed in the baskets, as well as hrutka, a custard-like cheese that is shaped into a ball and often decorated with cloves in the shape of a cross.

Once packed, the baskets are covered with richly embroidered cloths bearing a variety of designs particular to each nationality. Balas said peppers, for instance, are a hallmark of Hungarian embroidery.

"The family takes the basket to church, and a candle is placed inside," Balas said.

The candles are lit during the church service, and baskets are sprinkled with holy water and blessed. Following the service, families take the baskets home and partake of the blessed food.

Fayette County is steeped in tradition. Whether your celebrations include pysanky and paska or chocolate bunnies and jelly beans, enjoy a wonderful Easter.

To learn more about Fayette County, visit [www.FayetteCountyPA.org](http://www.FayetteCountyPA.org).

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