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Learning to talk turkey

By Anne Danahy
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STATE COLLEGE -- Kyong Hee Lee is from South Korea, and when she came to the United States she spent a lot of time looking at items on grocery store shelves, not knowing quite what to buy.

On Friday morning, Lee was one of about 15 women from other countries who learned how to cook a classic Thanksgiving meal under the direction of Jane Jantzer-Wilson.

"Now I am the teacher," Lee joked with the class before mixing canned soup with green beans to make green bean casserole. After a few minutes, she sprinkled dried French onions on top of the casserole and put it in the oven.

"We cook the whole meal: stuffing, gravy, mashed potatoes and cranberry sauce," Jantzer-Wilson said before class. She has been teaching the class, which meets regularly, for the past four years.

The class has been offered for 16 years and was first run by the Home Economists Association. Now, the local nonprofit group Global Connections (formerly known as the International Hospitality Council) sponsors the cooking lessons with the Women's Welcome Club.

Jantzer-Wilson said the idea is to give the

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students lessons in speaking English through the cooking classes and to familiarize them with foods they might not have in their home countries.

"One of the biggest hardships for a lot of international students is when they come here they're so overwhelmed with our grocery stores," Jantzer-Wilson said.

Friday's lesson in the University Baptist & Brethren Church's kitchen started with baked squash the green beans, followed by yams.

"One of the favorite dishes we have at Thanksgiving is candied yams or candied sweet potatoe," Wilson said to the class, before using a yam she had already baked to show the students how they are typically cut open and served with butter.

Next up was the stuffing. Jantzer-Wilson chopped up a few onions and sautéed them in an electric skillet, explaining that stuffing can include sausage, apples, chestnuts or whatever else the cook desires.

Later, the yams were taken out of the oven and Jantzer-Wilson showed the students how to cut them into a casserole dish and top them with brown sugar, butter and miniature marshmallows.

Sunyoung Park, a doctoral student from South Korea, said she has been taking cooking lessons but can't find food from her country.

"Also, I don't know how to cook American food," she said. "This is kind of a new experience. I don't know Thanksgiving food."

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