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A soup for cold seasons: Retired teacher revels cooking comfort food

Steve Fogarty | The Chronicle-Telegram

Gazing out the dining room window at her snowy backyard, Kathy Schroeder emphasized her love for making new dishes, especially on days when winter's chill lays over everything.

But she's not talking the stuff of exotic cooking shows or those restaurants where you need to take out a loan to step through the door. We're talking the kind of hearty fare that's the foundation of well-fed, satisfied folk everywhere.

"Good comfort food is what I go for," said Schroeder, a retired Vermilion kindergarten teacher whose Creamy Split Pea Soup recipe has made it into "Comfort Foods Cookbook," the newest volume published by Gooseberry Patch, a multi-million-dollar, mail-order online catalog and publisher of 100-plus cookbooks that was started in 1984 by two Delaware, Ohio, neighbors.

"I just love new recipes and cooking for people," said Schroeder, whose yummy-sounding recipe for "Cranberry Turkey" graced an earlier edition. "I buy a lot of cookbooks."

Schroeder, who freely admits to enjoying meals out and munching on junk food with husband, Charlie, and family, first saw her name appear in the cookbooks when one of her comments was published on the inside flyleaf, complimenting the company for "having just the kind of recipes my family enjoys."

She readily acknowledges that split-pea soup isn't something that springs to mind when people think of comfort food such as beef roast or fried chicken.

But soups do offer warmth and a sense of reassurance on a biting cold winter day.

"I lean toward soups in the fall and winter. And family and friends have told me that people who don't normally like split pea like this soup," she said.

Another plus of her recipes is that they are all based on everyday ingredients found on the shelves of a typical kitchen.

"This is no-frills cooking, just good basic eating," Schroeder said.

Coming from an ethnic family — "my mother is Slovak, so we cook big (as in lots of food)" — Schroeder's desire to whip up all kinds of tasty dishes comes naturally.

And, she admits, her love affair with food has been going on a long time.

"I just came across a photo of my brother and myself. He was 3, I was 4. We both had on aprons and we're peeking into the oven at a cake that our mother was baking," she said.

Cooks are not paid for their submissions, which are selected from thousands of original recipes to match the theme of a particular edition.

Those whose recipes are published receive a free copy of the cookbook, however.

For information, visit www.gooseberrypatch.com



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