

Alton Families Still Thrive On New Year's Traditions

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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ALTON - Some Alton area families are very aware of eating black-eyed peas and collard greens as a New Year's tradition for good fortune ahead.

The black-eyed peas tradition is so deep in the Southeast that there are all kinds of different recipes to prepare them. A Southern food researcher once said black-eyed peas

are associated with a “mystical and mythical power to bring good luck.” The same food researcher said collard greens are green like money and ensure you a financially prosperous new year ahead.

Abe Lee Barham has carried on family traditions of the black-eyed peas and collard greens and cooks them in a crockpot every year for New Year’s Eve. Abe’s children and even grandchildren now participate in the tradition. He said his family once again performed the black-eyed peas and collards ritual last Friday for this New Year's Eve.

Lee's family also follows the long-held tradition of always having cash in their pockets on New Year’s Eve, which is supposed to bring a continuous flow of money over the next 12 months.

Lee also follows the tradition of a man being the first to walk into a house on New Year’s Day from the outside for good luck. This person is often called a "first footer."

The other family tradition Lee follows with his family is not washing clothes on New Year’s Eve. According to folklore, “you will be washing for the dead” or washing a loved one away - meaning someone in the household will die in the coming year. Lee has been taught to get laundry washed, dried, folded, and put away before New Year’s Eve.

Jim Killion Jr. of Alton said his family has always followed the black-eyed pea /cornbread combination for New Year’s. He said he remembers his whole life people in his family doing that on the holiday.

Alton Alderwoman Rosie Brown said her family still does the black-eyed peas and greens tradition for New Year’s as well.

“I cook my black-eyed peas in a crockpot with some ham hocks for about three or four hours,” she said. “We have done this forever. I still go over to my mother’s house on New Year’s Day for this tradition. My mom, Anna Mae Lewis, is 85, and she still hosts this ritual to begin the new year.

“I have heard about a lot of Alton families doing this over the years,” she said. “New Year’s Day is always a sweet time together. My mom’s grandkids now are excited about doing this, and they are getting the torch passed to them. We have so many family traditions and memories and are thankful to have my mom with us.”