

Gifts from the monks

On any busy summer day, visitors fill the tiny Jampot shop in Eagle Harbor waiting patiently to purchase wild berry jams, hearty fruitcakes, savory baked goods and confections handmade by the monks of the Holy Transfiguration Skete, Society of Saint John.

It's a family tradition for many, dating back to the early 1980s when Father Basil and Father Nicholas journeyed to the Keweenaw Peninsula to establish a monastery within the remote countryside of the northwestern Upper Peninsula.

"Jampot is a vital component in the life of this monastery," said Hieromonk Basil, who was named Hegumen of the Skete following the 2017 passing of Father Nicholas. "(It) began as the improbable enterprise of picking wild berries and making jam. And jam is still the mainstay of our business."

About 75% of the monastery's revenue comes from Jampot sales, which continues well after the tourism season ends thanks to online sales. Late fall is usually tied up with fruitcake, preserve and confection production for the holiday mail orders. Utilizing the nearly 2,000 pounds of foraged berries — primarily wild thimbleberries sourced from about 300 local pickers — the monks remain busy crafting their goods and shipping them off around the globe.

"I was a junior at Michigan Tech when I heard about these two monks moving up to the U.P. to pick berries and make jam," said Dr. Thomas McGovern, who was born a Yooper and now lives in Fort Wayne, Indiana. "My wife, seven kids and I met the monks back in 2008 and have been purchasing from them since then. I get my staff some of their cakes and coffee, which they love."

The large 3½-pound Jamaican Black Cake, made with a variety of dried fruit that is moistened (aka soaked) in rum and wine for months, sells for \$50. Six different small cakes — with flavors like lemon and ginger — make up the Fruitcake Sampler for \$85. Gift packs feature a variety of jams (with more than 20 flavors including three sugar-free options), as well as candies, roasted coffee beans, trail mix and locally sourced honey or maple syrup.

For online ordering, visit poorrockabbey.com and for more about the monastery and the monks, visit societystjohn.com. The unofficial deadline for arrival by Christmas is Dec. 15; however, the sooner an order can be placed, the better. ≈

— Dianna Stampfler

Father Basil, one of the monastery founders (right), helps a customer. The Jampot bakery (bottom left) is a source of revenue for the monastery. Sweet treats (bottom right) and jams are popular.

