The Germans from Russia Heritage Society held its 47th annual International Convention July 12 to 16 in Bismarck. Kicking off the convention was a genuine homemade German dinner of knoephla and sausage, with or without sauerkraut, and kuchen served at the N.D. Heritage Center. It was hosted by the Dakota Pioneer GRHS Chapter.

Following the meal was a showing of the world premiere, “Gutes Essen: Good Eating in German-Russian Country,” a television documentary that celebrates the food culture of the Germans from Russia who emigrated to south central North Dakota beginning in the late 1800s.

Producers visited the kitchens of 10 cooks, many of whom are KEM Electric Cooperative members, and filmed them making strudels, pickled beets, knoephla soup, stirrum, fleischuechla, wedding kuchen, cheese buttons, rahmnooda, kartoffel-kurbis stumbus, blachenda and sausage. The documentary also highlights the historic Model Bakery in Linton, where kuchen is hand-crafted; tours Grandma’s Kuchen in Ashley to see a mechanized method for mass marketing; shares tips for making sausage at Schmitt Locker in Napoleon and Supervalu Grocery in Zeeland; and explores the church fair and supper in Strasburg and Sauerkraut Days in Wishek.

The food is great — and the stories are even better.

Marge Horner, a KEM Electric member from Napoleon, is a legend in her community. Known to make the best buns in town (and more!), Marge has been giving dough lessons for years to area 4-H students. Her
mentoring, and cooking and baking skills, have been featured in the Recipe Roundup pages of North Dakota Living twice.

Carmen Rath-Wald, president of the Tri-County Tourism Alliance, approached Marge and asked her to give another dough lesson to the kids — and this time, be filmed. Marge agreed.

“We had kids and flour everywhere,” Marge shares. The 4-H students learned how to prepare wedding kuchen and rahmnoodla, and how the dough should feel when it’s ready to bake. Marge’s 4-H lesson then became a life lesson for the kids, who may one day have families to feed.

“It’s a hands-on type of thing,” she says. “I told the kids, ‘If you touch it and it doesn’t stick to your fingers, then you are good to go.’”

Violet Diegel, a KEM Electric member from Wishek, made knoephla soup and stirrum for the documentary. Stirrum is like a pancake batter, but thicker. She puts it in a pan and fries it in oil, and chops it into pieces. The recipe was given to her by her husband, the late Waldemar Diegel.

Also recruited by Rath-Wald, who is her goddaughter, Violet says she was nervous to cook in front of a camera — but she felt it was an honor, in that through her participation, she will teach others about her heritage.

“My nephew always said, ‘Violet, we should do some filming while you do some cooking! All of a sudden it happened, and he didn’t get involved,’” she says with a laugh.

Laverna Kaseman, a former KEM Electric member from Wishek, made pickled beets. Growing up, she says she remembers her mother cooking beets until they were soft, and seasoning them with butter, salt and pepper. Her mother also added beets to vegetable soup.

“We love beets!” she says.

Her husband, Clifton, encouraged Kicking off the Germans from Russia Heritage Society’s 47th annual International Convention was a genuine homemade German dinner of knoephla and sausage, with or without sauerkraut, and kuchen.
KEM Electric Cooperative members Marge and Mike Horner are 100 percent Germans from Russia. Residents of Napoleon who live just four miles from the original homestead where she was raised, Marge participated in the documentary, “Gutes Essen: Good Eating in German-Russian Country.” In the film, she taught 4-H students how to make wedding kuchen and raumnoodla.