

FOOD for Lane County sites provide food relief with volunteer efforts

Participants and site coordinators alike say that volunteer effort keeps the program running smoothly

By Cory Eldridge
Freelance Reporter

The old man takes out his harmonica, wets his lips and begins his poem. It's about mountains.

After the first stanza he plays a short tune. A few patrons of the restaurant turn to find the source of the music, smile and continue eating.

After the fifth stanza he plays the last tune. His green eyes gleaming, John Suta, 82, says "That's how you write a song," and returns his harmonica to its case. "Isn't that wonderful."

The Dining Room, where this lesson in song-writing took place, is one of many sites in Eugene and Springfield that serve free meals to low-income members of the community. Powering these sites is a small but dedicated group of people, mostly volunteers, who prepare and dish out more than 200 meals daily.

Opened a year ago by FOOD for Lane County, the Dining Room currently serves families and seniors. The restaurant — with its green carpet, warm orange painted walls, wood paneling and cushioned booths — has a comfortable feel.

Avoiding the coldness of an institutional soup kitchen was one of the goals the designers had for the facility.

"The restaurant is a wonderful place to have a site," said Sadie Sponsler, the Dining Room's coordinator. "It's warm and has some ambience; we sometimes have someone come play music."

"I cook up enough meals to have just enough ... with no leftovers."

Tracy Joscelyn

Head cook, FOOD for Lane County Dining Room

Fifty to 70 people eat at The Dining Room every night. Most are regulars.

"Out of the 90 people in the computer, I know about 85 of them by name," Sponsler said.

Ronnie, who asked to have her last name withheld, brings her three children with her to the Dining Room nearly every evening.

"It's a place to sit down and talk to your kids after school," she said. "It has a family atmosphere."

The need for places like The Dining Room has increased because of the state's many job losses, Sponsler said.

For Suta, the Dining Room is a blessing.

"It's wonderful to have a place like this," he said. "It's getting harder to get food together; that's just the way it is."

Ronnie's family echoed that thought. Since being evicted from their home, the restaurant has become vital to them.

They are currently living in a friend's RV, but the temporary home has no running water, making meals hard to prepare.

"The kids can eat breakfast and lunch at



Tim Kupsick Freelance Photographer

Barbara Nevler washes dishes after a busy Monday evening in November at the Dining Room. The restaurant serves free meals to community members.

school, but we have to come here for dinner," Ronnie said.

Meals at the Dining Room are substantial. A bowl of soup and a hunk of bread is not on the menu. Chicken, rice, green beans, salad, tofu, stir fry, chimichangas and a wide variety of desserts make up one night's meal. The next day's meal could be just as eclectic or simple depending on what foods are available.

"We have something for the kids, something for the veggies, and something for the meats every night," volunteer cook Barbara Nevler said.

Tracy Joscelyn is the site's head cook and she decides the night's meal by what is stocked in FOOD for Lane County's coolers.

"I cook up enough meals to have just enough ... with no leftovers," Joscelyn said. "While it seems abundant in the FFLC warehouse, there is not enough food in this county to feed everyone that is hungry."

FOOD for Lane County is an organization that collects food and then distributes it to relief agencies in the area. The University is one of the organization's biggest contributors, Sponsler said.

The Dining Room and its sister site at the Salvation Army in Springfield are open every weekday except Thursday. On Thursdays and weekends other agencies serve meals.

Crossfire World Outreach Ministries' "Field of Dreams" program serves lunch on Saturdays under the Washington/Jefferson bridge.

Marlene Hinthorne, the project's pastor, said that the community meal was started by a woman who had been homeless.

"She made the statement, 'I just want to feed the homeless, because I know what it's like to be hungry. Even if I have to take beans and rice to the park and start feeding people that's what I want to do,'" Hinthorne said.

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Curb your consumerism with 'Buy Nothing Day'

The day encourages people to start thinking about materialism and focusing on more simple living

By Noriko Miyazaki
Freelance Reporter

Traditionally, the Friday after Thanksgiving has been the busiest shopping day of the year, when people "shop 'til they drop" at the malls. Yet it is also a day for thousands of people worldwide to participate in a global event and to stand together against the culture of over-consumption.

In 1992, former advertising executive Kalle Lasn decided to attack "Christmastime commercialism" one day at a time by starting a "Buy Nothing Day" at the beginning of the holiday shopping season.

The campaign's slogan was and is simple: Try simple living for a day — spend time with family and friends rather than spend money on them.

In a continuing attempt to try and engage people in a debate on the issues of consumerism and materialism and to educate them about the consequences of overconsumption, the Adbusters Media Foundation, a Canadian non-profit group, organizes Buy Nothing Day.

Since the launch of the grassroots protest against the holiday shopping frenzy, Buy Nothing Day campaigns have caught worldwide attention and support and are now being organized by several anti-consumer groups, environmentalists, globalization protesters around the world, encouraging people to "participate by not participating" on the busiest shopping day of the year.

The main activity is to actually buy nothing. But according to the Adbusters Web site there is no right way to celebrate Buy Nothing Day.

"The idea is to do something to spark up debate, not shut it down," a statement on the Web site reads. "The shining hope for a revolution in human consciousness lies in the actions of everyday people. And so in the most

profound sense, nothing has changed at all," A resistance experiment called "Whirl-Mart Ritual Resistance" has become another popular way of participating in the campaign.

Beginning in 2001, the ritual activity has been performed in a number of places across the country. In this campaign, a group of people gathers and silently pushes empty carts through the aisles of superstores such as Wal-Mart, the world's biggest retailer.

In Canada, some campaigners have been known to dress as a "blind consumer sheep." As they walk through stores ranting and raving about corporate culture, the campaigners pretend to be blinded by "Mr. and Ms. Corporate."

In England, participants set up tables in public settings where people can come and cut up their credit cards.

Former ASUO Environmental Coordinator Vivian Vassall said America could take a giant leap forward in improving the quality of life on Earth even if it alone celebrates Buy Nothing Day.

"The average North American consumes five times more than a person in Mexico, 10 times more than a person in China, and 30 times more than a person in India," she said. "This has got to change."

Alon Raab, a University Judaic studies instructor, said he has participated in anti-consumerism events for many years.

"During the first one held in Portland, I danced, marched, sang and protested as we wove our way through the streets of downtown among the people who were moving from one store to another with full shopping bags," he said.

Raab said Buy Nothing Day is an important step toward a world that is based not on money but on friendship.

"We are human beings and not consumers," he said.

For more information visit www.adbusters.org.

Noriko Miyazaki is a freelance reporter for the Emerald.

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