

Opinion: Weekly meal should be a community event

By Kathryn Reed

It's called a community dinner, but it doesn't really meet the definition of a community dinner. I want to change that.

Earlier this year I started volunteering at Bread & Broth one day a month. (My first experience was the Thanksgiving meal last year.)

Each Monday from 4-5:30pm anyone may drop by Grace Hall in South Lake Tahoe to receive a free hot meal. It doesn't matter your age or income or if you are a family or single or a couple. No questions are asked.



John Mauriello makes garlic bread for Bread & Broth diners. Photo/Kathryn Reed

It's evident most of the people *need* this meal. A few appear to be there for the camaraderie as well.

These people are so incredibly grateful. The smiles of gratitude – it can bring tears to your eyes. And they look you in the eye. They say thank you.

I'm the one who has had to work at looking them in the eye. I'm the one saying thank you. They probably don't know this, but they give me so much more than I am giving them.

I wish I could do more.

Part of the more is to make these Monday night gatherings a true community dinner. The reasons to do so are plentiful.

I have questions for the people who aren't at this meal. Where are you?

Where is the City Council, city staff, Douglas County commissioners, El Dorado County supervisors, Lake Tahoe Unified staff and board, Lake Tahoe Community College staff and board, Douglas County School District staff and board, people working in social services, people working in food service, the people who call the South Shore home? So, everybody, where are you?

If the people in position of power could see the needs of the other half (three-quarters?), it would perhaps shed some light on why Lake Tahoe continues to be called "poverty with a view". Imagine a city councilmember at each of the tables, but not able to talk to one another. Just eating, listening, breaking bread with their constituents.

Would the real issues of the city become clear? Would they figure out a sandwich board sign really isn't that important? Would they figure out people are what's important?

Then imagine interspersed with the regulars at Bread & Broth are you and your neighbors. Because, after all, the B&B regulars are your neighbors even if they don't live on your street.

Would you then think twice about the person on your street who doesn't use a bear proof can – is it that they don't care or that \$100 to buy one is a month's or more worth of food to

them? Would you help your neighbor more if you knew them better?

Bread & Broth doesn't have the resources to feed a huge influx of people. So, to pay for this, I challenge businesses to individually or collectively sponsor an Adopt-A-Day. For \$250 (tax deductible) this feeds more than 100 people. *Lake Tahoe News* is sponsoring tonight's meal.

And I have suggested to some of my team members that a donation jar be put out each night. (This was really my mom's idea because it's what they do where she volunteers.) A \$5 donation would pay for you and the person next to you to eat.

Besides getting a healthy meal and giving back, you would get to meet new people. People whom also call Lake Tahoe home.

Lake Tahoe has plenty of things wrong with it. But it also has plenty of things right with it. But as long there are people who struggle to find a meal each night, there is definitely something wrong. We can all help to make each Monday night evolve into a place people *want* to be instead of *need* to be.