

Bread & Broth carves up 25 years of Thanksgiving memories with traditional meal



On Nov. 24 volunteers dish up more than 200 Thanksgiving dinners at Grace Hall in South Tahoe. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

An aroma wafted outside, making the cold, hungry diners even more eager to get inside. This was no ordinary dinner they were waiting for.

A buzz filled the kitchen. Placemats were at each setting. Cans of whipping cream were at the ready to top the pumpkin pie. Nearly 50 volunteers helped pull off the annual Bread & Broth Thanksgiving dinner.

Thanksgiving dinner is always the busiest dinner for this

nonprofit that is celebrating its 25th year of serving a weekly community meal to those on the South Shore. While mostly it's people in need who attend the Monday meal, it is open to anyone.

Most years more than 250 people line up outside Grace Hall in South Lake Tahoe for the traditional Thanksgiving dinner. This year was no different. Christmas Cheer cooked the Thanksgiving meal 25 years ago, but Bread & Broth soon took over because they were better organized to do so.

"It actually used to be higher 20 years ago – 300-plus. The whole community part took in the meal, it was an event of the season, still is to a certain extent," Diane Weidinger, who runs the program, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "This year our Monday team will supply Second Serving with trays of the same dishes so people can enjoy another Thanksgiving meal on Friday."

For Tonya Schmitt the helping was more than she could finish. She was taking the leftovers home.

"It reminds me of home; right down to the sweet potatoes with marshmallows," Schmitt told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Like all the meals served at Bread & Broth, they are made from scratch by volunteer cooks. Monday's meal consisted of turkey, dressing, mashed potatoes (with gravy), green beans, sweet potatoes, cranberries, green salad and dessert.

Jasmine Pereschica attended with her daughter and son. Like most kids, her daughter wanted dessert instead of the healthier items on her plate.

"You can tell someone put a lot of thought into it," Pereschica said of the dinner. "The turkey is moist and not dry. The cranberries are really good."

Stephan Moise, executive chef at Ridge Tahoe, and his culinary team make 10 gallons of gravy every year.

Students in Irene Kaelin's fifth-grade class at Tahoe Valley Elementary School and kids from St. Theresa's religious education class made the festive placemats.

Walmart donated reusable bags that the volunteers filled with groceries so those in need had more to eat as the week went on.



Each week bags of groceries are available.

A quarter-century tradition

When Bread & Broth started is was under the ministry of St. Theresa Church. It has become more than that, even though St. T's is still a big part of the overall concept.

Today, people from other churches and non-believers help.

"When they first started years ago, St. Theresa's Church supported the program with a second collection several times a year," Weidinger said.

Cash was never flush. The recession made things worse. Then the Adopt A Day of Nourishment program and partnership with the Food Bank of El Dorado County started. Those two changes have put the organization on stable ground.

The group also receives donations from grocery stores, businesses and individuals. It comes in the form of cash, food, bags for giveaways, and containers for leftovers.

“B&B is now giving back to the church with its recent – over the last two years – purchases of the following commercial equipment: stove, oven, freezer, refrigerator, warming oven, 50-gallon water heater, prep island, industrial meat slicer and vacuum cleaner. We now pay a percentage of the utility bills for Grace Hall as well as refuse and repair costs,” Weidinger said.



John Mauriello is a regular cook at B&B.

Expanding food offerings

People have the opportunity to eat at Lake Tahoe Presbyterian Church on Fridays. That program is called Second Serving.

Local restaurants provide 5 gallons of soup.

Volunteer cooks then whip up a sandwich or pasta dish to complement the soup.

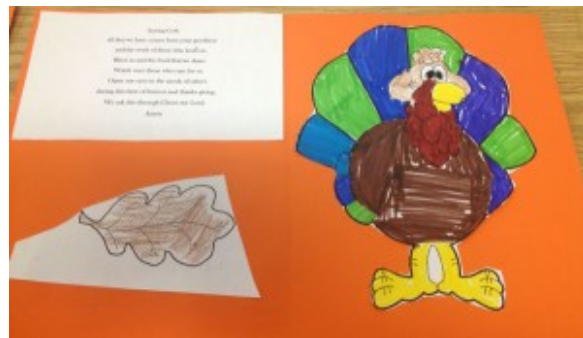
The Presbyterian church was part of the original Bread & Broth team 25 years ago. Founding member Susan Baker is still

involved as a Second Serving coordinator. Wendy David, one of the Bread & Broth cooks, has also been around since the beginning.

It takes a dedicated crew to pull off these meals each week. About 100 volunteers work for Bread & Broth, and another 25 for Second Serving.

A 17-person advisory board oversees the big picture. Nine committees make sure the nuts and bolts get taken care of.

“Unlike 25 years ago we have 20 cooks, plus seven from Second Serving, who cook once a week, once a month,” Weidinger said. “Years ago they had two cooks for each of the two days a week they served (Tuesday and Thursday), those four cooks would be in the kitchen every week. In the 1990s they had approximately 20 volunteers and eight board members.”



Placemats are from children.

No ordinary meals

This is no simple fare being dished up each week.

While the cooks have license to be creative, they are also somewhat limited by what is in the pantry and cooler. They take inventory of what's available a few days beforehand and lay out the protein they want to use.

“They arrive Monday morning to access what products were picked up from the grocery stores a few days earlier and then hope that Monday's donations from other grocery stores will

supplement the meal. They are making decisions on what to make and serve 3½ hours before the doors open at 4pm,” Weidinger explained. “If the donations are weak, they survey the canned products in the pantry and come up with a dish. Most cooks prepare a complete meal – protein, starch, at least one vegetable, salad – that is if greens were donated, otherwise canned fruit salad – hot garlic bread or rolls.”

The goal is to not purchase anything extra. Sometimes it’s necessary – like cilantro for a Mexican dish.

Dessert is usually donated by Raley’s or Safeway.

It wasn’t always this good. Meals used to be simpler.

“We currently serve meals that would be considered gourmet compared to the hotdogs, meatloaf and casseroles cooked in the early ’90s. We pride ourselves on serving a meal that our guests might order in a restaurant if they could afford it; chicken picatta with a lemon caper mushroom sauce, roasted root vegetables with a Moroccan apricot sauce (nothing was purchased for these sauces, it was all in the pantry), Ratatouille using fresh farmers market vegetables, mashed potatoes using fresh spuds, spice rubbed lamb, pizza from scratch – even the dough, beef stroganoff, shredded chicken enchiladas, fruit salad with summer ripe berries, salmon and pork shoulder.”

Going forward

Weidinger would like Bread & Broth to establish a scholarship fund for people to attend Lake Tahoe Community College’s culinary program.

“I believe that education is one of the keys that open doors of opportunity. Hard work and good ethics are two other keys, together with some luck and good fortune people from all social and economic backgrounds can have fulfilling careers,” she said.

Providing meals more days of the week is a desire by some.

And while it may not seem like a big deal, getting a washer and dryer on site is a goal. This is because as it is today all the dirty linens – and there are many with all the aprons, wash rags, potholders and other items – have to be washed at someone's house.

Weidinger doesn't believe the need for these types of food programs will go away.

"As long as people are underemployed, jobless and homeless, there will be a need. No one should have food insecurities," she said. "The people we feed are our neighbors; we can't let them go hungry when most of us are enjoying three meals a day."