

New Friendship Trays branch marks anniversary

By Cheris F. Hodges
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Friendship Trays is celebrating 30 years of feeding the needy. On October 4, 1976, a handful of volunteers delivered six meals to elderly residents in the Charlotte's Elizabeth neighborhood, according to the organization's web site. That first Friendship Trays delivery

as the result of five churches recognizing that there was an emerging need in the community.

By 1993, over 700 volunteers - largely from churches and businesses - were driving more than 40 routes with six stops each, and there were still more people who needed help.

To serve them, Friendship Trays would need to be able

to prepare additional meals, and there was not enough room at St. Martin's Episcopal Church. As organization leaders considered options for expansion, the answer came in the form of 5,000 square feet of donated warehouse space.

Volunteers launched a capital campaign to secure the funding and in 1996,

the new Friendship Trays Kitchen opened.

Today, the need is still there and, according to Lucy Bush Carter, executive director of Friendship Trays, the group is establishing another satellite office at Friendship Missionary Baptist Church on Beatties Ford Road.

"We are opening it in early 2007," she said.

"Members of the church already deliver meals for us and they invited us to establish a satellite there."

Carter said that there are 23 routes near the church that volunteers travel weekdays. That translates into about 180 meals delivered.

Volunteers from the Beatties Ford area drive to the Friendship Trays office

on Distribution Drive. Carter said the new satellite office will make things more convenient.

And volunteers are always needed, Carter said. "We have an infinite need for volunteers," she said.

To sign up as a driver for Friendship Trays, call (704) 333-9229

Historic church faces possible closure ait celebrates 164 years

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW ORLEANS--Members of one of the nation's oldest historically black Catholic churches will gather this weekend to commemorate its founding in the days before the Civil War.

They hope to have more such celebrations in the years to come, but the fate of St. Augustine Catholic Church these days is as uncertain as some parts of this storm-wracked city.

In March, the Archdiocese of New Orleans announced plans to close the church because of declining membership, though St. Augustine has since received an 18-month reprieve.

The church sustained roof and bell tower damage when Katrina struck in August 2005, but the sanctuary was spared flooding. Since the storm, St. Augustine has been a source of comfort and peace for parishioners like Sandra Gordon and others who lost so much.

"Our life has been shattered to beyond what anyone can believe. The one stable thing in our lives is our church," said Gordon, a member of St. Augustine for almost all of her 52 years and the church-parish council president.

For months after Katrina, Gordon would pull into the driveway of her flooded New Orleans home and, heart sick, turn her car around and head to St. Augustine.

As the parish planned to

kick off a weekend-long commemoration Friday of its 164th anniversary, Gordon said she couldn't wait to celebrate despite concerns over the church's fate.

St. Augustine was founded by whites and free people of color in 1841, then consecrated and dedicated on Oct. 9, 1842. Around that time, free black members of the congregation bought pews in the church so more and more family members and slaves could attend Mass.

Protests erupted over the announced closing this spring, and the archdiocese eventually relented and gave

the parish an 18-month grace period to rebuild its congregation, reinstate spiritual education programs and get its budget in order to avoid closure.

The parish has been working to meet those goals - recruiting members from flood-damaged and shuttered churches and reaching out to residents who have not yet returned.

"We're going ahead with our plans to rebuild," said Linda Santi, a spokeswoman for St. Augustine.

Still, membership fluctuates and finding a priest to officiate at Sunday Mass is a

weekly struggle, Santi said. Santi said she hopes this weekend's anniversary celebration will boost member-

ship and raise money and awareness. The celebration was to begin Friday night with a benefit party featuring

local musicians Jason Berry, Germaine Bazzle and Charmaine Neville, among others.

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