

# Helping the hungry at Christmas time — and all year round

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Staff Writer

During the holidays the spirit of giving can be demonstrated in many ways. For the homeless, hungry people of our community, the Inter-Faith Council (IFC) and Meals on Wheels provide that sense of holiday generosity.

According to Audrey Layden, IFC chairman of community relations, the council "is an organization that tries to catch people who fall through the safety net."

IFC is mostly dependent on volunteers except for a few positions. It involves around 500 to 700 volunteers and 37 area church congregations from the community.

Layden said that a volunteer staff gives the council more freedom. "Because leadership changes every year, we can be flexible, creative and able to take a look at things," she said. "We don't get in a rut."

The community kitchen is one service offering meals to the homeless or to anyone off the street. In November of 1982 the IFC opened the kitchen on Rosemary Street and later moved it to a bigger location on Merritt Mill Road in 1985. Last year the kitchen served 23,452 meals to the hungry.

The kitchen employs the majority of volunteers — about 150 to 200 overall. Each day a different congregation agrees to volunteer. The congregation coordinator works to ensure that members are organized and present on their assigned day. In addition seven kitchen monitors take one day a week at the kitchen to provide continuity, take care of conduct problems and oversee any problems with food distribution.

Layden said the community kitchen has been very fortunate. "A lot of people can do something concrete about the problem," she said. "Instead of getting frustrated, they can do something about it. Somebody ate today because I went and worked."

Breakfast is served at the kitchen five days a week from 6:30 a.m. to 7:30 a.m. The meal usually averages about 20-25 people. Lunch, which was originally five days a week, is now seven days a week during the noon hour. Lunch serves the most people, approximately 45. Dinner is primarily for shelter clients instead of walk-ins.

The community kitchen uses an open door policy. Anyone can walk in off the street, no questions asked. The only rules are the obvious: no violence, no abusive language, no alcohol or other substances, no loud noises or disturbances and no weapons.

A ballet to celebrate the season

The Chapel Hill Ballet Company will dance its way into a holiday mood with the performance of its latest ballet, "The Nightingale," this weekend.

"The Nightingale" is based on Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale, "The Emperor and the Nightingale."

According to Miss Dorrance, the company's artistic director, the ballet tells the story of the emperor of China, who brings a nightingale to his palace to live with him and his courtiers.

"They live an artificial life based on artificial beauty," Dorrance said. "That's one of the main ideas in the ballet, that true beauty is what we have in nature."

When the emperor is given a gilded mechanical bird by the emperor of Japan, though, the nightingale is forgotten, and it is only when the emperor and his courtiers finally break the toy bird that they realize their neglect of the nightingale has driven it away. However, the nightingale returns in the end to save the emperor's life.

"The ballet has a nice holiday message about sacrifice and being willing to serve others," Dorrance said.

The show, which features 25 children from the community, is not just a show for children. "The color and richness of it all is something all ages can appreciate," Dorrance said.

The ballet was choreographed by Dorrance, Carol Richard, Barbara Bounds Milone and Joy Javitz. The backdrop for the show was designed by Duke University artist-in-residence Wenhai Ma.

John Caldwell, a community kitchen monitor for the past three years and an IFC volunteer for the past six years, said that, for the most part, people are grateful for the service. "Most of them are thankful," he said. "They say the blessing before they eat, and then they sit around and laugh, play cards, or watch TV."

As a monitor Caldwell is responsible for keeping peace at the kitchen. The most difficult part of his job, he said, is sometimes enforcing the rules. "The hardest thing is having to put them out of the kitchen

for a few weeks," he said. "I don't like to do it, but it's part of my job."

On Thanksgiving Day, a full dinner with all the trimmings is prepared. For Christmas, a special holiday meal is also given to the hungry. The community kitchen also decorates the building and collects gifts for its annual Christmas party.

On the day of the party, the gifts are distributed to those who come in. While some of the gifts are useful things such as sweaters and socks, others include things such as perfume.

Layden said she felt that both the

agents and the volunteers gain rewarding experience at the community kitchen. "The people have a place to go," she said. "They can interact with other people without alcohol or other substances. They have a place where they're welcome."

As a volunteer, Layden said, "You begin to realize that you are valuable as an individual. Individuals working together can make a difference."

At the shelter there are also valuable lessons to learn about reality. "Walking around Chapel Hill and

Carrboro, you see beautiful communities," Layden said. "You never see poverty some people deal with until you get involved as a volunteer."

A food pantry of canned foods and non-perishable items is also available to those who have no access to food. The pantry is located in the Inter-Faith Council building on Wilson Street. Groceries are donated by area congregations, schools and scout groups. Last year, 1,545 clients were given free bags of groceries at the food pantry.

Meals on Wheels is another area

organization that offers food to the hungry during the holidays as well as year-round. To get the help of the organization, a volunteer first visits the home to determine actual need and to set up a sliding scale. If people are not able to pay, the organization charges them less.

Meals on Wheels also depends on volunteers. Over 100 volunteers take an average of 80 hot lunches a day to Chapel Hill, Carrboro, southern Orange county and Bingham Township. All meals are prepared by Classic Food Services. Volunteers also bake desserts for the hungry.

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