

Greenwood

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EMPTY BOWLS

Filled By A Caring Community

by despina yeargin
photographs by sammantha bailey

As the economic downturn began to affect the greater Greenwood area, leaders of the all-volunteer organization, Greenwood Soup Kitchen Ministry, wondered how they would make ends meet and continue providing meals to the area's hungry. The Soup Kitchen's Board Chairman, Norm Fawcett, says that the demand for meals rose dramatically in a very short period of time. "Between 2008 and 2009 we went from serving 24,000 hot meals a year to almost 40,000." Area churches had been providing well over 50 percent of the budget for the Soup Kitchen, but now they were struggling financially too. Fawcett and the Board couldn't imagine how they could continue, "and then the good Lord sent us Empty Bowls," he says.

Empty Bowls is the annual fundraiser for the Soup Kitchen, and all proceeds from the event go directly to the non-profit. Mr. Fawcett says that the fundraiser now provides "close to 40 percent of what it costs to provide about 34,000 hot meals a year to our area's needy. That's around 16,000 meals a year paid for through the fundraising efforts of Empty Bowls. We could not do what we do without them," he says.

And, as impressive as the results are, Empty Bowls certainly could not happen without a caring community of 200-plus volunteers who gather



Norm Fawcett, Exec. Dir. of Greenwood Soup Kitchen and Empty Bowls committee members; (L to R) Laura Bachinski, Donna Conley, Lynn Isenhower, Maureen Kilburn, Dohnna Boyajian & Linda Neely meet to "stir up" plans for this year's event

once a year around the belief that their time and efforts will fill the empty bowls of many community members who are less fortunate. Just as all ingredients in the making of a nutritious and heart-warming bowl of soup come together as one, so do individual citizens rally around this one generosity-filled and inspirational fundraising event once a year.

Consistently, all volunteers remark about the shared communion--making a difference, seeing families of volunteers and patrons grow and everyone having fun together. Often it's difficult to see the results of our contributions, but with this event, all volunteers are encouraged, knowing that the annual fundraiser feeds needy neighbors six days a week.

Veteran volunteer Lee Robirds says, "Not everyone can volunteer their time to work at the Soup Kitchen during the day, but Empty Bowls allows so many other people to support [them]. I'm so glad that this is one small thing that I can do!" And it seems that the event, indeed, does come together around a lot of people who can give their one small thing.

Mary Woodiwiss and her son began their volunteer work at the soup kitchen in 2007. When their schedules made it difficult to continue, they volunteered with Empty Bowls. Mary noticed that there was no vegetarian soup option, so she jumped right in. "I offered to make a hearty vegetarian chili from a recipe my mother-in-law had found," she says.

Greenwood Medical Alliance, a group of doctors' spouses who volunteer for various projects throughout Greenwood County, and GASP (Greenwood Area Studio Potters) founded Greenwood's Empty Bowls event in 2009 when Donna Conley (one of the GASP potters) suggested the event to her fellow potters, thinking it might be a good way for the potters to offer their support to the Soup Kitchen. Laura Bachinski, one of the potters and a member of the Medical Alliance, provided the link that brought both groups together, and together they've worked since 2009, proving that a caring community of volunteers can make a big difference in the lives of many who are less fortunate.



Soup kitchen volunteers sharing a moment before guests arrive.



Six days a week soup kitchen volunteers serve guests a mid-day meal.



Mary Woodiwiss prepares her popular veggie chili for this year's Empty Bowls event.

In the early days of Empty Bowls, most of the Medical Alliance members cooked the soups and desserts. Today, over fifteen area restaurants supply the soup in addition to a few individuals who, like Mary Woodiwiss, continue to contribute to the evening's offerings.

Jamie Tarasidis is responsible for recruiting the dessert-makers and all 600 desserts for the event. She knows exactly how many desserts there are because, as she says, "I collect them all on my dining room table the day of the event. We can't transport them to the Soup Kitchen until that day's meal service is over," she explains.

As the event approaches, Jamie sends a request for dessert makers via email and posts on Facebook. "Within 24 hours we have commitments for over half of the desserts," she says.

Maureen Kilburn who coordinates the volunteers, has helped with Empty Bowls since the first year. She says, "I was volunteering at the Food Bank in 2009, and saw the need for the Soup Kitchen first hand. I thought the concept for Empty Bowls was fantastic--choose a hand-crafted bowl, choose a soup and dessert, eat dinner together in the actual Soup Kitchen (not a fancy dinner in a decorated banquet hall) and raise money for a very worthy cause. Win, win, win."

Laura Bachinski explains that this event is "so much more

than the potters who make bowls that you choose that night. There is an entire caring community involved in the production of Empty Bowls. From soup and dessert makers to wait staff to Lander students who help with parking and all of the Emerald High students who clean the bowls for people to carry home," she says.

Cindy Leary, another veteran volunteer, started out by volunteering at the Soup Kitchen with her children and now helps with Empty Bowls. "The most fun I have is to ladle soup with Jane Marshall," she says. "We have served together since the beginning. We are often seen singing, laughing and dancing as we serve the soup."

No job is too small or too difficult. Where there's a need, you can find someone with the skill set to do the work. Linda Neely, a Greenwood potter, volunteers her time in doing all of the graphics & photography for Empty Bowls, and in addition to so many spouses of doctors contributing their time, some of the doctors themselves also volunteer on the day of the event, including Matt Bachinski, David Isenhower, Jukie Leary and Greg Tarasidis. So it's not unusual to meet your physician when you attend Empty Bowls. He may just be washing dishes when you see him or helping with cleaning, parking and serving soup.



Jamie Tarasidis, Empty Bowls committee member showing off one of 600 handmade soup bowls created by artisans and community members for the event.



Soup kitchen volunteer preparing sandwiches before guests arrive.

Other members of this caring community of volunteers come from Emerald High School and Lander University Students.

Dr. Daniel Harrison, a Lander sociology professor, has been recruiting students for Empty Bowls since 2012. Helping out in a variety of ways since then, today Harrison, Lander students and other professors assist with parking for the fundraising event.

Harrison says that he and other parking volunteers “are often the first people that guests see when they get to the fundraiser, so it is fun to welcome people to the event. Empty Bowls has become so popular, you see such a cross section of the community, from local politicians to doctors, attorneys, business owners and just friends and neighbors. It is always exciting to see who will turn up.”

Maria Alvarez, a four-year member of Emerald High School’s Interact service group, is a proud Empty Bowls volunteer. She and other Interact members help in many ways during the event, primarily with washing the used soup bowls. “The environment at Empty Bowls is always welcoming. We are all excited to be a part of something so important for our community,” says Alvarez. “I know that my work will have a positive impact on the people of Greenwood. I like to help others. At Empty Bowls, I know that my work will help feed the people that go to the Greenwood Soup Kitchen.”

Emerald’s Air Force Junior ROTC raised their hands to help

also. Lt. Colonel Bernard Taylor says that the AFJROTC works to develop “citizens of character dedicated to serving their nation and community.” One example of service for these cadets is the volunteer work they contribute to the success of the annual fundraiser by cleaning tables, serving drinks and plating desserts. While to some the work may seem simple, every bit of every volunteer’s contribution is crucial to the success of Empty Bowls.

From 2009 when the first Empty Bowls raised \$6,500, to last year’s fundraiser with over \$31,000 in proceeds, this event continues to support the good work of Greenwood’s Soup Kitchen. This, in part, is due to the sponsorships for the event. Lynn Isenhower, an Empty Bowls volunteer since the beginning, was instrumental in getting the sponsorship program started, which has helped to increase revenue every year.

Through the generosity of over 700 people (potters, woodworkers, basket makers, students, doctors, patrons, sponsors, friends, family and neighbors) who come together on this

one night to show how much they care, the empty bowls in our community continue to be filled.

Volunteer Cindy Leary says it best in quoting her father’s advice. “My dad always told my four siblings and me as we grew up, ‘As soon as a person can provide a roof over their head and put food on the table, it’s time to serve someone else.’ I’m just happy I can follow my dad’s advice and serve in a productive and fun way!”



VOLUNTEER TO MAKE A BOWL:

Want to make and decorate a bowl to be used at Empty Bowls? There have already been several events at Edgefield Clay Studio and Main & Maxwell, but you still have time to participate. No experience required. Make two and donate one. \$20/person, September 12, 6:30-8:30pm, Main & Maxwell. 864-223-6229 to register.

NINTH ANNUAL EMPTY BOWLS EVENT INFO:

When:

Thursday, October 12, 2017

Seating:

5:30, 6:30 & 7:30pm with takeout available 5:45-7:30pm.

Location:

Greenwood Soup Kitchen, United Center at 929 Phoenix Street

Tickets:

Available September 5th and usually sells out within a week! Adults, \$25. Children 12 & under, \$15. Purchase from the Greenwood Chamber of Commerce, The Arts Council or by calling Norm Fawcett at 227-3421.

HOW IT WORKS:

Guests choose their own hand-crafted pottery or wooden bowl and then enjoy a gourmet light meal of soup, rolls, dessert and sweet tea or lemonade. You take home the bowl you choose as a remembrance of all the "EMPTY BOWLS" there are in the world.



Emerald High School Interact & AFJROTC lending a hand at Empty Bowls. (L to R), front row: Amber Ashley, Shania Anderson, Cadet Hannah Doyle, Hailey Ouzts, Maria Alvarez. Back row: Cadet Anthony Conklin, Cadet Alyssa Williams, Cadet Jonathon Henderson, Cadet Nicolas Daragh, Cadet Taylor Gingrich, Alexis Pickell



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