

Martin's Volunteers' Newsletter

December/January 2004

A Brief History of Martin's

Martin de Porres House of hospitality was created in 1971 as a soup kitchen to serve free food to homeless and hungry people. It was started by a priest and some lay people as a Catholic Worker House to be part of the CW movement initiated in the 1930s by Dorothy Day. The primary purpose of the CW movement was and is to put into practice the "works of mercy".

Martin's first location was at Bryant and 23rd Street in a former bar with a maximum occupancy of 49. As the number of homeless increased through the 70s and into the early 80s, long lines were common and our residential neighbors were not pleased. Eventually enough pressure was put on our landlord that he evicted us.

Through nothing short of a miracle we were able to find our current home, raise the money necessary to buy and renovate it, overcome objections from our future neighbors and bureaucratic hurdles to be able to continue our mission and work at 225 Potrero Avenue.

In the early 90s we again faced a crisis of overwhelming numbers of hungry people and increasing violence. After much prayer and reflection we made some modest changes. Things dramatically improved when we reopened after our winter break. Another minor miracle.

Which brings us to the present. Many millions of meals and much joy and sorrow later, we are in our 33rd year. While our roots are clearly in the Catholic Worker movement, we have evolved into a more ecumenical, spiritually diverse community. We are in fact a large family of volunteers and guests whose unifying principle is love and compassion.

With the blessing of volunteers who have been with us faithfully for 30 years as well as newer volunteers, we hope to continue this work of serving our brothers and sisters in need.

- Charlie Engelstein

OPEN MIKE

Bring your talent to Martin's on Friday, January 23 from 7 to 9 pm. Whether it's poetry, song, dance, spoken word, stories, original or not - here's your chance to share it. Remember, it's OK to be the audience, too. For more information, call Charlie at 552-0240. Coffee, tea and refreshments will be served. No drugs or alcohol, please.

New Newsletter Needs News & Name

The idea for a newsletter for our volunteers was suggested at the Fall Potluck. Some of us have been at Martin's for many years, others are relative newcomers. We all need to be kept informed and learn about Martin's past, present and future. We hope to email this newsletter to those who have given us their addresses. Copies will be available in the break room. Your comments and questions are welcomed. Email them to acwein@earthlink.net or leave them in the office addressed to "Arlin". Our best intentions are for this to be a monthly newsletter. Oh yes, we need a name.

Holiday Meals Bring Cheer and LOTS of Volunteers

The holidays are special times at Martin's. If you've never volunteered on Thanksgiving Day or Christmas Eve, it's hard to imagine as many as 100 volunteers preparing, serving and cleaning up a holiday meal for our guests.

At Thanksgiving and Christmas, our guests are served their meals at their tables by their volunteer waiters. No soup today, but a meal of turkey in gravy, mashed potatoes, coleslaw, cranberries, bread and butter and many, many desserts. We cook 35 turkeys for these special meals. We even had ice cream at Christmas and served over 300 cups.

Live music and singing add to the holiday spirit. And when our guests leave on Christmas Eve, they receive gifts of socks, hats, rain ponchos, handmade scarves, toiletries and bag lunches.

Martin's traditionally closes for two weeks after Christmas, giving all a needed break to re-energize ourselves for the coming year. And our guests? As one told Charlie when he saw him come into the office, "What are you doing here? You're supposed to be on vacation!"

So how are we doing?

At the potluck, we talked about the difficulty of maintaining our volunteer staff. Some shifts were chronically short of people, others only occasionally. Since that time, meal hours have been cut back somewhat and there has been a noticeable improvement. Our guests have been understanding about these changes. Of course, we can always use more volunteers, especially on weekends, but many people have stepped in and made other shifts better staffed. Some of us just need to be asked.

**Martin de Porres House of Hospitality
225 Potrero Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94103
415-552-0240**