

Martin's Volunteers' Newsletter

September-October 2004

Volunteer Annual Potluck and Meeting: Report from a Newcomer

This was the first meeting I attended at Martin's and what follows is an anecdotal report of the goings-on of the meeting.

After a wonderful potluck meal where old friends talked and new friends were made, we made our way out to the garden for what seemed to be the "annual photo". Not knowing quite what was going on, I just followed the crowd and laughed with everyone as Mim got the self-timer set up. After documenting the fabulous gathering, we gathered in a circle and Barbara welcomed everyone. What stood out in her welcome was the gratitude she expressed for everyone's efforts in making Martin's a truly special place to be. As a new volunteer and as someone who has worked in many different types of organizations, expressed gratitude is a wonderful start to a meeting.

New volunteer handbook

The meeting started with introductions and then Jim introduced the Volunteer Handbook into which he seems to have put quite an effort. As a new person on the scene, I very much appreciate knowing where to find answers to questions I might have about first aid, about the tasks that need to be accomplished on a given shift, about how to diffuse conflict. I normally come in at 6:00 am to work my shift and, although I had an excellent orientation, I could always use the information provided by this resource. Thanks, Jim!

The human issues

What followed were a couple of issues relating less to the tasks of a shift and more to the human issues that arise. Charlie brought up the issue of abuse within couples that come to Martin's. He brought up a couple of examples of guests who have been abused seeking out their abuser, as is common in dysfunctional relationships. At the end of Charlie's presentation, I came away not with "how to" solutions to dealing with this issue but a call for all of us to raise our awareness about it and to start sharing insights as they come.

Feeling safe

The other "human" issue that was brought up was that of safety awareness, especially as it regards young female vol-

unteers and the way that some of the male guests relate to them. A couple things are worth passing on: 1) Everyone is responsible for everyone feeling safe at Martin's and we should all have our eyes and ears out for situations that seem unsafe; 2) If you see a volunteer in a conversation with a guest and it seems she/he can't transition out of the conversation, go over and ask the volunteer to come help you as a way to change the dynamics of the situation.

Several announcements and reminders filled out the rest of the meeting and you'll find them in this newsletter.

Peter Rothblatt, Thursday Breakfast

Martin's Website Coming Soon

Check out our website! Soon it will be visible if you go to <http://martindeporres.org>. In the meantime, a generous (but short-term) volunteer and his co-worker friend (Charles and Constantine) designed a lovely site for us to start with. You can view it by entering <http://209.11.147.31/> as the address.

Stay Informed

When you come in to work, check the lounge and the information board for updates. Another good source of information is this newsletter. It's published every two months and is in the office, posted on the refrigerator opposite the stove and is on the bulletin board in the lounge.

To Thank Our Donors

The door bell rings, you open the door and someone hands you two bags of toiletries. What do you do? Of course you smile, thank them and bring in the bags. But there's one more thing: Find out who they are **WRITE DOWN THE NAME AND ADDRESS OF THE DONOR** so Martin's can send them a thank you letter. That's what that yellow pad of paper hanging on the wall just inside the door is for. Please remember to use it.

Peter Rothblatt not only wrote the article describing the volunteer potluck but decided to tell his story about coming to Martins. Every volunteer has such a story and if you'd like to share it, call Arlin at 415-444-0611 or email her at acwein@earthlink.net.

How I Came to Martin's

Ever since I moved to San Francisco in 1987, I have lived on the east side of town, first in Potrero Hill and now in Bernal Heights. I have also worked almost exclusively on this side of town, at a Dance Center in SOMA, rehearsing with various dance companies and doing artist-in-residencies in public schools. So it is that for 17 years I have driven down Potrero Avenue and glimpsed the wooden wall with the banners and watched people come and go throughout the morning and mid-day. And for many of those years – especially the last five or seven – I thought I would make my way through the entrance.

Being a Libra, things gestate for a while before coming to fruition. So five or seven years after thinking the thought, I was at the Unitarian Church to listen to my friend – a community minister – preach about service and spirituality. To start the service, one of the board members announced that the church was again working with four other churches to provide emergency shelter during February and March and that they needed volunteers to help provide breakfast to those spending the night. In the past year or so (you see, things take time), it became clear to me that, although my paid work is in service to others, I needed to start working in service and not be paid. So here was my opportunity to put that desire into action.

I signed up to work a couple of the morning shifts at the Unitarian Church. One morning, I cooked up more hashed browns than I'd ever seen in my life, then served them up along with eggs and sausage. I loved being there, I loved serving and respecting these folks who are so often disrespected and neglected, rendered invisible. I loved being at their service. I also liked driving through the city at 5:30 am, before the city woke up. And I loved doing some good in the world before 8 am. What a nice way to start the day!

You know where this is heading.

It took another couple of months, but I finally stopped at Martin's one afternoon in the middle of lunch. I talked with Charlie, got a really good feeling about him, saw his calm in what looked and felt like a somewhat chaotic (or at least very energized) scene and told him that I was interested in working a breakfast shift. Typical of me, I said that I wanted to start, if possible, working every other week and then see about moving to weekly shifts. Well, after my first Thursday with Mim, Carol, Roxie, Beth and others, I decided to come to work *every* Thursday morning.

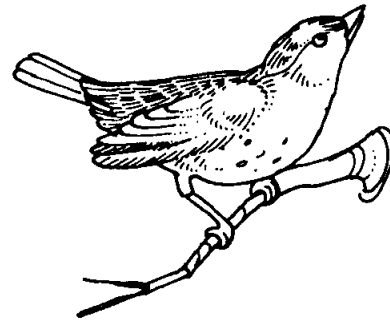
Since starting in June, the word that keeps coming to mind is: dignity. The staff treats one another with dignity,

the staff treat the guests with dignity and much is done so that the guests treat one another with dignity as well. I'm grateful for whatever finally got me to walk through the door and grateful at the end of each shift for being there.

By Peter Rothblatt

Think Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving at Martin's is special: busy, hectic, joyous and fun all at the same time. Lots of first-time and once-a-year volunteers come to help. That's why we need a good supply of "regulars" to answer their questions and show them how we do things at Martin's. We need lots of hands that day. You can be done in time to get to your own family feast - or have your fill of turkey at Martin's and go home knowing you've spent your Thanksgiving in a very giving way.



Martin's Annual Memorial

Sunday, November 7, at 4pm Martin's will hold our annual memorial remembering those loved one who are no longer with us. We say a few prayers, share remembrances, cry and laugh and then have a little something sweet, to sweeten the sorrow.

Martin's hold two memorials a year, one in the Spring and one the first Sunday in November. Our memorials let us and our guests spare time together that is very special and moving. Anyone who is in need of an opportunity to grieve once again and to remember all those we love is welcomed to attend.

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