

Volunteers Ladle Merrily

Church Soup Club Gives The Poor Warm Feeling

By JOHN KNOBLE
Staff Reporter

The folks from the "Honest Bowl of Soup" club which meets at noon Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays in Christ Church Parish Hall, 84 Broadway, are celebrating their first anniversary this month.

It's been a year since New Haven has been aware of the Great Depression-like effects of inflation on the city's non-familied poor, and has instituted the tried and true Soup Kitchen strategy for neutralizing the unwelcome hunger pangs.

The hearty soups dished out by four or five volunteers to from 50-65 lunchers each soup day range from imitation "bouillabaise" (mixed fish chowder) to pumpkin, with every variety of peas or bean combinations bubbling up in the pot as donations of potential ingredients inspire.

Chicken soup, prized for its known medicinal as well as nutritional qualities, is a favorite, some of the gourmet chefs of the club can even get something appetizing out of squash.

Sandy haired, Dixie bred Mrs. Diane Wellborn, wife of a divinity student who heads a crew of 27 volunteers — "We need more so we can start serving on Fridays" — says that with the soup goes bread, peanut butter, coffee, tea, and sometimes dessert, "but when there isn't any, jam on bread does the job."

She says, "Christ Church donates space in its new parish hall, and facilities of its modern, beautifully equipped kitchen."

She estimates that including estimated value of donated food, about 16 dollars is invested in each meal. That comes out to about 30 cents per person.

"But you couldn't touch the same nourishment in a restaurant for under a dollar," she says.

There is no question about the diners getting much more than their money's worth, because the cost of the lunch is zero. And although it is sometimes called a "club," there is no club involved that you have to join. "You just have to be hungry," Mrs. Wellborn says with a pretty laugh.

The soup kitchen started in November 1977 serving one meal a week on Saturdays. With funds added from the "Walk Against Hunger," from local churches and businesses, and with apples from home apple trees, leftovers from church dinners — "We really get the scalloped potatoes and with other food donated by anyone who has heard about the need by word of mouth" the kettle was kept simmering enough so that gradually more days could be added.

Guests often take a hand with the cleanup, so that "if you would like to be a volunteer in preparing and serving the meal, but hate K.P., we can use you and you won't have to wash a dish."

Half the volunteers are men; two others, women, are getting credit in a nutrition course at Albertus Magnus. There are "no bosses. Everyone pitches in together."

Mrs. Wellborn says the kitchen is also soliciting recipes for creative soups. "We had a dickens of a time looking around to find a recipe for pumpkin soup," Mrs. Wellborn said. "But most of the soups just happen. We freeze leftovers against the time when we are going to have something like the same soup again. But we also get ideas like, 'What would happen if we added a can of donated spinach to the beef noodle?' We're never in a rut," she said. "Always a new taste in the mouth."

There will be no 84 Broadway soup kitchen on Thanksgiving Day because the club is merging forces with the annual Downtown Cooperative Ministry \$1 gourmet Thanksgiving dinner, which this year will be at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Chapel and Olive Streets.

"We'll have the whole works for that," Mrs. Wellborn said — turkey, dressing, cranberry sauce and pumpkin pie."

During the summer the volunteers ran their own garden in space donated by the Dixwell Community House, on Ashmun Street. "We raised corn, beans, tomatoes and carrots," Mrs. Wellborn said. "But that reminds me, if anyone has home garden produce you've run out of friends to give to, give us a call."



Volunteers at 84 Broadway Free Soup Kitchen ladle unique version of chicken soup to guest. (Staff Photo by Kirby Kennedy)