

Monday dinners build community

Suppers: Eight Monday meals for those in need

By John Lavenburg

jlavenburg@inkym.com About 15 people joined volunteers at the Unitarian Meeting House this week for the second Winter Monday Supper of warmth, food and a sense of community.

Some who came were homeless, or didn't have the means to cook a meal for themselves. Others were simply looking to connect with other islanders at the start of the slow season.

Dinners will be held in the 11 Orange St. church Mondays through Feb. 24. Private chef Avi Chitrit created the event with Unitarian minister Linda Simmons through a grant from the Community Foundation for Nantucket for anyone who's homeless, faces food insecurity or just wants to enjoy a meal and fellowship with others. Simmons doesn't know the exact number of Nantucket's homeless population, but said she has anecdotally heard of at least a dozen people without secure housing. There are even more who may rent a room but don't have access to a kitchen for cooking.

"There's enough homelessness and food insecurity on the island where we should all be thinking of what we can do to make a difference," she said.

Volunteer Cinda Gaynor shed some light on what some people experience based on her 37 years on the island.

Gaynor said it's especially hard SUPPER, PAGE 12A

"There's enough homelessness and food insecurity on the island where we all should be thinking of what we can do to make a difference."

– Rev.Linda Simmons Unitarian Church



SOUL FOOD: Chef Avi Chitrit tops off homemade hummus at the Winter Monday Supper held at the Unitarian Meeting House on Orange Street.

Photo by Nicole Harnishfeger

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because of the seasonal work environment and cost of living. Many people aren't aware of the struggle some go through because the homeless population isn't in

For Chitrit, it was important to uphold a family tradition he carries with him from his mother and grandmother of serving the meal.

one particular place and we don't often see food insecurity, she said.

Along with providing a meal, the goal is to hear the stories of those who have slipped through the cracks and feel misunderstood, Simmons said.

"We're hoping to learn about each other, break the barriers and strengthen the community. We thought a great way to do that would be through a meal," she said.

Chitrit, Simmons, volunteers and members of the church-sponsored Immigration Resource Center gathered around 5 p.m. Monday to set up and cook. The tables were neatly set with tablecloths, napkins, silverware and candles.

The meal began around 6 p.m. after Simmons led grace that re-emphasized the importance of gathering as a community.

After that, everyone began to eat, although most were often distracted by conversations with those at the table.

Chitrit started the meal with traditional hummus, hummus and ground beef, baked tofu, salad and warm rolls with butter. With the help of some volunteers, he cleared the tables before the next course was individually served to each person.

"It's a nice warm touch," he said. "A buffet isn't as special. I made this for you, I want to make you happy."

There were four courses total. The second was vegetable noodle soup, followed by meatballs and mashed potatoes, all made by Chitrit.

Dessert was a pear cake with white-chocolate frosting and toasted granola provided by The Pearl and The Boarding House pastry chef Katie Stotler.

As the meal continued, more and more seats filled up and Chitrit prepared the full slate of food for everyone who came. In the end he was left with an empty kitchen.

"That's my goal. That's why I do this," he said. "I'm very happy when I look over and see no leftovers."

The final task of the evening was providing shopping bags filled with bread, fruit, chips and soda for people to bring home. There was also a table of warm clothing for the taking, supplied by the Nantucket Family Resource Center.

Simmons said she hopes more people will volunteer to continue building community. For more information, e-mail her at revlindasimmons@gmail.com