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Congregation Ner Tamid, other volunteers fill stomachs for Christmas

By JAMES A. JONES JR.
jajones1@bradenton.com

BRADENTON -- Members of the Jewish congregation of Ner Tamid were dishing "merry Christmas" greetings and heaping trays of turkey dinners in equal measure at the Our Daily Bread soup kitchen.

Hundreds of down-on-their-luck men and women, and a few children, too, filed through the food line Sunday in what kitchen manager Penny Goethe called a "ballet" of cooking and serving.

Fifty turkeys, four cases of green beans, 150 pounds of potatoes, 100 pounds of sweet potatoes, dozens of pies and more went into making possible the mitzvah -- a good deed -- by 10 volunteers from Ner Tamid.



"This is a labor of love, unfortunately," said Elaine Mittler, Ner Tamid board chair.

Her daughter, Rhonda Mittler, stood in front of the serving line and handed each diner their tray of food and greeted them with a cheery merry Christmas.

"It's a nice way to give everyone time to be with their families," Rhonda Mittler said, referring to Our Daily Bread's Christian volunteers.

"What would we be doing? Going out for Chinese food and watching a movie," she said. "Besides, it makes you feel good."

Among those happy to get a meal at Our Daily Bread were Charles and Lucy Ribordy who are out of work and have two young children, Charles Jr., 5, and Leah, 2, and a third one on the way.

As they waited for the doors to Our Daily Bread to open, Don Huntsinger, and several members of Kingdom Life Church sang Jingle Bells, Rudolph the Red Nose Reindeer, Silent Night and other Christmas favorites to the crowd that gathered for dinner.

One of the singers, Deb Pike, seemed quite taken with little Charles Jr. and handed him a set of sleigh bells to shake.

She then pulled him up front and the little boy smiled shyly as his parents beamed.

"It was heart-warming. To see that little boy and to put a smile on his face put a smile in my heart," Pike said. "I think this is what Christmas is all about." Another of the Kingdom Life Church singers, Betsy Plant, called it a "humbling" experience.

The smiles from the people who came for a free meal showed that they understood that people care, and that they feel love, Plant said.

Inside, Ken and Rhonda Kaplan kept the pumpkin pie coming for servers.

The Kaplans have been volunteering at food kitchens for more than a quarter century.

"What the people out there don't realize is that it does more for me than it does for them," Ken Kaplan said.

Many of the folks moving through the food line showed their appreciation.

"Thank you for giving up your holiday for us," said one woman.

Stacey and David Jacobson, and their 17-year-old daughter, Jaclyn, a Southeast High School student, were among those serving food.

"I think it is a great opportunity to give back to the community," said David Jacobson. "It's nice to give everyone something nice for Christmas."

Also helping out Saturday were Marvin Shepard, who handled the head count, and his wife Marcia Shepard, who worked the middle of the serving line, next to Joy Yelin.

James A. Jones Jr., East Manatee editor, can be contacted at . Tweet him at @jajones1.

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