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Peninsula News Review - Community

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# Neighbours host souper time



Jan Bergink (back) and Bill Judge wash up after lunch.

Christine van Reeuyk/News staff Buy Peninsula News Review Photos Online

By Christine van Reeuyk - Peninsula News Review

Published: February 16, 2011 1:00 AM

Young adults fill a table in one corner with laughter and playful gestures.

Across the hall a mom feeds a baby while her toddler plays with his food alongside a couple of grandparent-types. Smells of beefy noodle soup fill the space between, as do table upon table of seniors seated elbow-to-elbow.

Around the room they're slurping soup, buttering buns and nibbling sweets.

Eight years in, the Neighbours weekly soup outreach at St. Andrew's Anglican Church is a well-populated Wednesday event. Now it's an award-winning luncheon earning the 2011 Hearts of the Community award for community service project or group.

"Without the dedication of our volunteers and the wonderful humour and fun they bring to our project each

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week, there would be no need for the three big pots of soup we serve each week, and the 8,500 buns each year," said organizer and nominator Donna Godwin.

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Funding comes from mostly anonymous donations; a box is tucked on a side table hidden like a mini polling booth to preserve the privacy of anyone making a donation. They also get in-kind donations like farm produce, bun dough, buns or cookies for desert.

The church donates the kitchen and hall, but not all volunteers are church members. The volunteers — most of them well into their retirement years — stir soup, load buns into baskets, divvy up cakes and cookies and offer table service with a smile. They do the dishes, clear and clean tables and offer bits of conversation for the lone diner. The roster of about 25 volunteers (though the number ranges through the year) have served nearly 43,000 bowls of soup over eight years.

"At Neighbours we don't ask 'are you finished?' We ask 'would you like another bowl?'" Godwin said.

Godwin and fellow organizer Allison Humphreys have noticed a rise in guests, particularly in the past couple of years, but point out it serves as a critical social outing for the week. "We have lots of widows and widowers," Humphreys said. She points out a widower who was struggling with the loss of his wife. "Look at him, smiling," she added. The Sidney Single Seniors often meet over lunch — and some aren't so single anymore Humphreys notes as an aside. Youth pulling their lives together through the help of the Springboard to Success program at the Beacon Community Services slip in for a healthy, free lunch once a week.

"This outreach is to all people, to socialize and sit with people and chat," Godwin said. "The environment is safe, warm and friendly. Many of the people who come just want to talk to someone while they have lunch."

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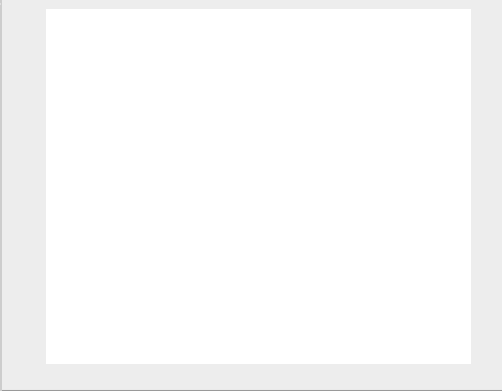
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