Coach Kellogg, Chancellor Holub serve soup for charity

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Published: Tuesday, January 27, 2009
Updated: Tuesday, January 27, 2009

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Hundreds of local residents packed into The Pub on East Pleasant Street in Amherst last night for the Amherst Survival Center's first annual 'Empty Bowls Dinner.'

The sold-out benefit brought in around 500 people in an effort to combat hunger in the local community.

Guests were served by a waitstaff which included locally-known figures like former University of Massachusetts point guard and current head basketball coach Derek Kellogg, Chancellor Robert Holub and his wife Sabine, Amherst Police Chief Charles Scherpa and Town Manager Larry Shaffer.

"Everyone that's working here tonight is a volunteer, which is amazing," said event organizer Ruth Wade.

Kellogg said he was excited to be there and came to The Pub earlier in the afternoon to practice serving tables and carrying around trays.

"I've been pretty good," said Kellogg, mentioning that he was told by one of the workers in the kitchen that he "might have a future in this."

Other members of the volunteer staff were also glad to help out.

"I love the Survival Center and the work they do there," said Shaffer. "Whatever I can do to help out, I'm happy to do."

"In these economic times, I'm more than happy to do as much as I can to help people out," agreed Scherpa.

State Sen. Stanley Rosenberg and state Rep. Ellen Story were scheduled to serve food as well, but could not make it due to legislative responsibilities, said Wade.

As people entered, they picked out their own ceramic bowls made by local artisans, which they could keep after the dinner. Those in attendance could choose from a wide selection of soups and were also served salad and freshly baked bread.

Randi Stein of Amherst and Ruth Love Barer of Hadley, Mass. said they both came to support the Survival Center.

"This is a wonderful way to support [the Center]," said Barer. "The crowd here is amazing. I'm proud to be here."

"I'm impressed with this bowl," said Stein. "It's such a tangible representation of what is needed."

Amherst resident Tammy Parks said she purchased her tickets soon after they went on sale.

"I came to support a good cause, to get a beautiful bowl and to have soup," she said.

Despite recent cutbacks, the Survival Center, established in 1975, is "expanding its food pantry, meal service, health clinic and other programs to meet the region's growing needs," outlined a recent statement.

"The 'Empty Bowls Dinner' is a great way to support those who have been hit hardest in the recession," said Cheryl Zoll, the center's executive director. "They need your help more than ever."

The benefit, sponsored by The Pub and People's Bank, "comes at a critical time for the Survival Center," the statement said.

Demand for services at the agency rose by nearly 30 percent in the last year as the global economy weakened

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Demand for services at the agency rose by nearly 30 percent in the last year as the global economy weakened and forced the state to cut some of its funding to the Center.

MBA students at the Isenberg School of Management (ISOM) helped publicize the event. Through a student organization called Net Impact UMass Amherst, students are serving as board fellows on the Amherst Survival Center board. According to the ISOM website, Net Impact UMass Amherst, an affiliate of a larger Net Impact organization, seeks to improve the world "by growing and strengthening a network of leaders who use the power of business to make a positive net social, environmental and economic impact."

Guests also bid in a silent auction which included glass bowls by Northampton artist Josh Simpson. Though he is a local resident, Simpson's work has obtained international recognition and is displayed in collections worldwide, including those of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and Canada's Royal Ontario Museum.

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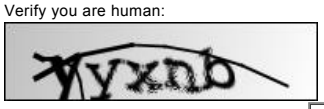

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