Amherst Survival hosts first 'Empty Bowls' dinner

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

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Around 500 people will get the opportunity to be served by such local celebrities as University of Massachusetts Chancellor Robert Holub and head men's basketball coach Derek Kellogg tonight at Amherst Survival Center's first annual "Empty Bowls Dinner" benefit, which sold out over the weekend, according to a statement from the center.

Courtesy UMass.edu

The Amherst Survival Center will host its first annual Empty Bowls Dinner tonight at The Pub in Amherst Center.

The meal, served at The Pub on 15 E. Pleasant St. in Amherst, will feature hearty soup, freshly baked bread and salad provided by local restaurants and businesses to assist the Center in trying to help fight local hunger.

Despite recent cutbacks, the 34-year-old Survival Center is "expanding its food pantry, meal service, health clinic and other programs to meet the region's growing needs," the statement said.

"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 and forced the state to cut some of its funding to the Center, according to the statement.

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."

Other guest waiters will include Amherst Town Manager Larry Shaffer, state Sen. Stanley Rosenberg and state Rep. Ellen Story, said Kara Kharmah, an MBA student at Isenberg helping to organize the benefit.

Each guest will receive a handcrafted bowl by local artisans and will have the chance to bid in a silent auction that includes 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.

Though all tickets are sold out, the agency accepts donations online through http://people.umass.edu/support/asc/.

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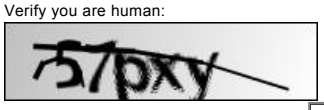

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