

ACTNOW

KATHY MAGNUSON



Jennie Lanners, dark shirt, and other volunteers served up soup at the Powderhorn Park Empty Bowls Project in November.

“Folks just need the right outlet to plug into to make giving easy. This event does that.” —Jennie Lanners

IFYOUGO:

What: Empty Bowls benefitting STEP, the St. Louis Park emergency program

When: March 8, 2012, 11 a.m.-2 p.m. and 4:30-7 p.m.

Where: St. Louis Park Recreation Center, 3700 Monterey Blvd., St. Louis Park

What: Empty Bowls benefitting Keystone Community Services and The White Earth Land Recovery Project

When: April 2, 2012, 11 a.m.-7 p.m.

Where: Hamline University, Klas Center, 3rd floor, 1536 Hewitt Avenue, St. Paul (on Taylor Ave., between Snelling and Pascal)

Cost: Free with donation requested

FFI: To find other Empty Bowl Projects in Minnesota and elsewhere, visit www.emptybowls.net



Empty Bowls

by Kathy Magnuson

It all started on a Tuesday night in Jennie Lanners' community education clay class at Powderhorn Park. Four friends who believed that people are generous by nature were looking for a way to make change in their neighborhood.

“As a working artist, I wanted to give back in a way that was more meaningful than writing a check or donating canned goods,” Lanners explained.

The Powderhorn version of the Empty Bowls Project was launched. In this national, grassroots effort to fight hunger, local potters create bowls. Guests are invited to a meal of soup and bread. For a \$20 donation that goes to hunger and food insecurity projects, guests are encouraged to take a bowl home with them as a reminder of empty bowls in our world.

The fifth annual Powderhorn Empty Bowls Project was Nov. 4, 2011. The endeavor has grown to having a board of 12 people and over 200 volunteers. Over 1,730 people came to eat over 200 gallons of vegetarian soup including curried lentil, potato leek, squash and black bean chili. “We just keep making it until we run out,” Lanners said. The more than \$27,000 raised in 2011 went to the Division of Indian Works food shelf, Sisters' Camelot and Youth Farm and Market.

“Everyone who volunteers has an individual reason for it,” Lanners said. “Some folks like to be in the community connecting with others. Some like to make soup or bread. Others like to be a part of the ceramic production. Some just like to be near the energy and creative buzz of the event.”

And why do so many people come out for soup and bread? “Folks attend the event for the same reason people volunteer. The park becomes the community living room for the day. Breaking bread with your neighbors is a powerful thing. You never know what connection you'll make with the person sitting next to you or across from you at the table,” Lanners said. “Folks just need the right outlet to plug into to make giving easy. This event does that. It sends people home with a bowl that serves as a tangible reminder that they have done something to fill the bowl of a neighbor less fortunate.”

“It makes you believe in the city,” Sister Joan Tuberty explained. Sara Chechik saw a flier and came for lunch with her daughter and other mothers and daughters. Melissa Garrity, who had met a friend for lunch, said, “If people's basic human needs are taken care of, then life is very different. It takes away fear.”

“There are many great problems in this world that I can easily feel overwhelmed by. Hunger is easy to fix,” Lanners said. “Feeding your neighbors not only helps the family or individual receiving the assistance, but it strengthens the community as a whole. I like to believe each year we make a little more of a difference. Each step forward is progress. Feeding our community shouldn't be challenging. It should be second nature to extend a helping hand.”

Where do you see women connecting and making change in your world? Send me your story, magnuson@womenspress.com