

Sowing the Seeds of Holiday Cheer

"WE DO LOVE VOLUNTEERS. THAT'S HOW WE SURVIVE."

The holidays are hectic for everyone, particularly charity workers. And while we are all too painfully aware of our shrinking finances, the ranks of the needy are expected to swell this season.

What's a cash-strapped Good Samaritan expected to do?

For starters, you can put that wallet away and instead gift the most precious gift of all: your time.

FREDERICKSBURG AREA FOOD BANK (www.fredfood.org) director Oya Oliver cited one recent national study that estimated volunteers' time being worth roughly \$18.77 per hour.

She noted that in her area, the **FREDERICKSBURG BAPTIST CHURCH** (www.fredericksburg-baptistchurch.org) hosts a community dinner each Thursday night and is always on the hunt for folks to help cook, serve and interact with the assembled diners.

Likewise, Oliver said the food bank is always appreciative of those who donate much-needed services, like pro-bono electrical work and landscaping care, or sign up as on-call delivery drivers.

"We do love volunteers. That's how we survive," she said.

OUR DAILY BREAD (www.our-daily-bread.org) director Lisa Whetzel said her group is once again working with the Fairfax County government to spearhead their annual holiday-assistance program, during which ODB pairs adoptive activists with families in need.

According to Whetzel, adoption options include:

- providing a full Thanksgiving meal for an entire family; and/or,
- providing a complete holiday meal and one gift for each child under 18 (they suggest gift donations of about \$25 per person).

Donors deliver the meals/gifts directly to the sponsored family—a philanthropic perk that many families have said helps crystallize the experience in youngsters' minds. "Kids are able to make that concrete connection with giving," she stated. "A lot of donors really like that."

Meanwhile, ODB will host its annual "Stock the Pantry" canned-food drive every weekend from Nov. 8 through Dec. 12 at the old Joe's Pizza location (3922 Old Lee Highway, Fairfax). Items can be dropped off from 10:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. each weekend day, with all donations being split between ODB and participating community-aid groups.—WR



2933 Wilson Blvd.; 703-812-9352. Proudly serves Mexican and Salvadoran fare including burritos, pupusas and tamales. • \$

NAM VIET RESTAURANT

1127 N. Hudson St.; 703-522-7110. Long-standing Vietnamese restaurant serving up high quality food. • \$\$

NVM RESTAURANT 3

2950 Clarendon Blvd.; 703-524-4440. The 20-ounce, bone-in Texas rib-eye receives a savory rub (paprika, thyme and coffee) before hitting the grill and shares the stage with an equally hearty vegetable ragout featuring garlic, onions, button mushrooms, brawny browned spuds, chopped asparagus stems and tangy artichoke bits (well done). • \$\$

SAWATDEE

2250 Clarendon Blvd.; 703-243-8181. Specializing in classic Thai cuisine; shrimp and crab meat garden rolls are favorites. • \$

SETTE BELLO ☺★

3101 Wilson Blvd.; 703-351-1004. For a dinner so sweet, dessert becomes unnecessary, sample the mezzelune—a bowlful of bulbous, half-moon ravioli filled with creamy pumpkin and amaretti (almond-paste cookies), all swimming in a perfumed cream sauce punctuated by minty-fresh sage. • \$\$

SOBE SEAFOOD

3100 Clarendon Blvd.; 703-528-0033. Mister Days' seafood spin-off features daily specials from the deep; fish tacos, clam linguini are staples. • \$\$

TOSCANA GRILL

2300 Clarendon Blvd., Unit A; 703-465-2100. Italian outpost specializing in pizzas, homemade pastas and veal. • \$\$

WHITLOW'S ON WILSON

2854 Wilson Blvd.; 703-276-9693. Standard American fare with live music most weeknights. • \$

CRYSTAL CITY

ATHENA PALLAS

556 S. 22nd St.; 703-521-3870. Greek gem in Crystal City; offers some American dishes. • \$\$

JALEO ★

2250-A Crystal Drive; 703-413-8181. There are more than 50 tapas to choose from, both hot and cold, and half the fun is trying as many as possible, particularly since they seldom fail to satisfy. • \$\$

PORTOFINO

526 S. 23rd St.; 703-979-8200. Crystal City staple focused on Italian and fresh seafood. • \$\$

SAIGON CRYSTAL

536 S. 23rd St.; 703-920-3822. Traditional Vietnamese specializing in everything from pho to rockfish. • \$

PENTAGON CITY

NVM SINE

1301 S. Joyce St.; 703-415-4420. Dig into half-price burgers on Mondays (build-your-own style, with bonus toppings like corned beef), and half-price appetizers on Tuesdays (Irish nachos bring homemade chips

To sign up as a holiday program sponsor, please visit: www.our-daily-bread.org/holidayprogram.php. To explore additional food-volunteerism opportunities in your area, please visit: www.food-forothers.org, www.feedingamerica.org or www.some.org.