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Special people enable special Christmas Day dinner at Wildwood Soup Kitchen

By PATRICIA STEELE, DAILY SUN

WILDWOOD — The generosity of people who give their time and money for others never ceases to amaze and delight Dana McCarthy. As a board member of the Wildwood Soup Kitchen Advisory Board and self-proclaimed go-fer on Thursdays in the kitchen, Dana meets a lot of people who give to the kitchen.

"We have businesses, churches and individuals who donate regularly, and these people keep the doors open," Dana said. "But it's wonderful when you get surprises." Recently, he and the soup kitchen volunteers were wonderfully surprised with a phone call from Karl Almond, controller at Outo Kumpu Stainless Inc. in Wildwood. "He asked me to come by the business, and I was just floored when he presented the soup kitchen with a check for \$2,000," Dana said. It's donations like this that keep the doors open and the hungry fed, Dana said.

The soup kitchen will serve Christmas dinner on Thursday, and another two special people helped make this meal possible. "Each year, Art and Karen Gruby purchase food for the kitchen during the holiday season," Diane McCarthy, Thursday's head cook, said.

This year, Diane went with the Grubys when they went shopping for Christmas dinner.



"We bought hams and all the trimmings and had spent around \$300 at Sam's Club," Diane said. "Well, Art said keep shopping, we've got \$909 to spend. We bought a lot of supplies and food for the coming year."

Art told the McCarthys the gift is not from him, it's from the Lord.

"He feels compelled to give to honor his mother," Dana said.

There are a number of people who make Christmas special for soup kitchen patrons, Dana said.

"We had a waiting list for people who want to volunteer to prepare and serve Christmas lunch," Dana said. "Most of our regular volunteers will have the day off to spend with their families."

Village of Virginia Trace resident Norma Talarek is one of those volunteers who normally have the Thursday shift.

"I love the feeling of helping people and love the people I work with," Talarek said. "I have mixed emotions about not being at the soup kitchen Christmas Day."

She appreciates the volunteers who want to work so she can spend the day with her family, but she

misses all the people who come to the kitchen.

Dana said there will be enough volunteers, and workers will be able to serve lunch to those who visit the kitchen. Usually, the meal is served cafeteria-style, but Christmas is special.

Diane is making ham and some of her favorite dishes including make-ahead, party-mashed potatoes and bacon-smothered peas, ambrosia, and there will be dessert.

"We plan to serve our regular 112 take-out meals and figure there will be about 60 people at the kitchen," Diane said. "The number is usually less on holidays, because some of our patrons spend the day with family."

In 2007, the soup kitchen served 52,790 meals; this year, the kitchen will exceed 60,000 meals served, according to Dana.

The soup kitchen neither seeks nor receives any government funding, relying solely on the generosity of individuals, churches, social and civic groups and businesses.

"It's remarkable that we can continue to accomplish our mission," Dana said. "God is good!"

And they do this without any paid employees. Everyone — from the cook to the driver who delivers meals in and around Wildwood — is a volunteer.

For more information about the Wildwood Soup Kitchen, call 748-1008.

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