

Urban Ministry Readies Thanksgiving Meal for 4,000

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GREENSBORO, N.C. - Over the next 24 hours, three waves of volunteers at Urban Ministry will prepare, cook and serve a Thanksgiving dinner to over 4,000 of the city's homeless and poor.

The first wave of volunteers began setting up and cooking turkeys and hams Wednesday afternoon in preparation for the ministry's 21st year of serving a Thanksgiving meal. A second wave of volunteers begins arrived around 6 a.m. Thursday morning to carve the turkeys and hams, fix the stuffing, mash the potatoes, heat the green beans and ready the pumpkin pie.

The sheer quantity of ingredients that will go into the meal is impressive: six cases of cranberry sauce, 30 cases of stuffing mix, 30 cases of green beans and 53 cases of sweet potato pie.

A third wave of volunteers will bring a Thanksgiving breakfast to the homeless residents of Urban Ministry's Weaver House. Some meals will be delivered directly to shut-ins and the homebound.

The Thanksgiving meal will be served from 10:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Thursday.

"If it wasn't for the Weaver House, we would have been sleeping in our car, literally," said Katanju Joseph, who moved to Greensboro with her son looking for a fresh start but fell on hard times.

"This is the first Thanksgiving that I have not been able to celebrate," she said.

According to Rev. Mike Aiken, the executive director of the ministry, said all volunteer positions have been filled, but funds are still needed to support the meal, which is estimated will cost about \$12,000.

Donations should be sent to the Thanksgiving Fund at the Community Foundation of Greater Greensboro, P.O. Box 20444, Greensboro, NC 27420.

Aiken said the ministry normally serves about 40,000 people like Joseph a year, but this year, he expects to serve more like 65,000.

"It's a community effort," said Ken Conrad, of Libby Hill Seafood Restaurants, who is coordinating the Thanksgiving meal. "I mean, without these volunteers, this wouldn't happen."

Joseph said it's not just the food, but the friendly atmosphere, that will bring her to spend Thanksgiving Day at Urban Ministry.

"Very, very, very thankful. Absolutely," she said.