Tuesday, November 23, 2010

Westside celebrates Thanksgiving
Volunteers sought, donations needed, activities abound

Frank Morris
staff writer

Tuesday, November 23, 2010

For many in the West Valley, giving thanks means giving back.

That's what a group of Tolleson volunteers have been doing for more than a quarter century.

This year commemorates the 28th annual Dr. Charles A. Landis Thanksgiving Day Dinner. The event, sponsored by the Tolleson Service Committee, provides free traditional Thanksgiving meals to all who attend.

"It's a beautiful community event. Everybody gets involved," Tolleson Mayor Adolfo Gamez said.

Last year, more than 1,300 people were fed and more than 1,800 meals were served.

The event is named for Landis, who was superintendent of the Tolleson Union High School District from 1978 to 1992.

"I think we had 500 people come the first year and it just grew," Landis said. "People come together and things come together. The next thing is you're worried about people showing up, but they do. I don't know where they come from, but they show up."

Landis said the event began when it was first suggested that the West Valley needed a St. Vincent de Paul-style Thanksgiving dinner.

"That's when we took the concept and started the Tolleson Thanksgiving dinner," Landis said.

The key to the event's success is its volunteers and donations, Gamez said.

"We get everything donated: the food, the labor, the delivery of the food; the VFW is involved, businesses are involved. It's truly a community event," Gamez said.

Volunteers consist primarily of students from the five campuses in the Tolleson Union High School District. Many of the adult volunteers, especially from the local VFW post, have been part of the annual event for more than 15 years, organizers said.

This year, turkeys have been donated mainly by Crystal Rose Funeral Home, Greer-Wilson Funeral Home and Chase Bank. Everkrisp and Rousseau Farming have provided the vegetables; Holsum Bakery's offered the rolls; and Albertsons is dishing up the pies.

"As far as food items, we're in good shape," Landis said. "But donations are always accepted, and if people want to volunteer, I never turn anybody down."

The Charles Landis Thanksgiving Dinner takes place from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Thursday at the Tolleson Union High School cafenasium, 9419 W. Van Buren St. Doors are open to everyone.

To learn more, or to donate or volunteer, contact Landis at 623-478-4027 or 623-680-6684; or Armando Morado at 602-810-5481. Donations can be sent to P.O. Box 339, Tolleson, AZ 85353.

More to give
The 13th annual McFeast takes place at 7:30 a.m. Thanksgiving Day at the Estrella Vista Reception Center, 1471 N. Eliseo C. Felix Jr. Way in Avondale.

Volunteers can show up the day of the event, and should arrive by 7 a.m., organizers said.

The event starts with breakfast, which includes a Happy Meal for children. Each child then receives a turkey for their family. The four-hour fest ends with a raffle.

In 2009, McFeast served more than 5,100 people, and handed out 81 new bicycles, 300 backpacks, 3,000 books and helped 231 children in need.

The annual event, which began in 1998 when some 400 people received free meals, is spearheaded by Don Mellon, owner of 18 West Valley McDonald's restaurants; as well as Sharolyn Hohman, president and chief executive officer of the Southwest Valley Chamber of Commerce; David Schwake, food service director for Litchfield Elementary School District; and Cassie Wilkins, director of All Faith Community Outreach Center.

Meanwhile, the American Legion Post 61 in Avondale is still looking for a few good volunteers to help feed Thanksgiving meals to everyone who steps through the organization's doors at 35 N. Dysart Road.

Some 300 guests are expected to show up for a traditional feast of turkey and all the trimmings, Legion officials said. Any underprivileged person is welcome to dine at the Legion hall from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Thanksgiving Day.

Volunteers are needed from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Thursday. To learn more, call 623-932-4960.

Anyone looking to assist local food banks can still do so, as well. For details, contact the following:

- St. Mary's Food Bank Alliance at www.FirstFoodBank.org.

- All Faith Community Services Buckeye Food Bank at 623-386-3513.

- Agua Fria Food and Clothing Bank at 623-932-9135.

Post-turkey
Those who engage in too much overeating over the holiday can be kind to their waistlines with a couple of different events, specifically geared at getting rid of Thanksgiving Day flab.

Walk off the turkey in Waddell with a guided hike around the Black Rock Long Loop at White Tank Mountain Regional Park.

The hike begins at 10 a.m. Friday. Participants should show up at Area 4. There is a $6 per vehicle park entrance fee. The park is located about four miles west of Loop 303 on Olive Avenue. For information, call 623-935-2502.

Meanwhile, a Turkey Buster Fitness Class is offered at Estrella Mountain Community College Fitness Center from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Friday.

Those looking to burn off some Thanksgiving calories can participate in any or all of the five segments offered. Cardio Kickboxing begins at 10 a.m., Zumba Dance Fitness starts at 10:30 a.m., Boot Camp gets going at 11

a.m., Aerobic Cycling launches at 11:30 a.m. and Yoga finishes out the day at noon.

The class is free for those currently enrolled at the fitness center. For those who are not enrolled, the class is $5.

The college is located at Dysart and Thomas roads in Avondale. For information or to register, contact the center at 623-935-8400 or visit www.estrellamountain.edu/fitnesscenter.

Anyone looking to have a happy Thanksgiving holiday weekend, should do so as well.

Frank Morris can be reached by e-mail at fmorris@westvalleyview.com. Reporters Sara Bisker, Emily McCann and Rich Ott contributed to this story.

Related Links: