

On a day of overindulgence, a simple breakfast

Kitchen provides regular service to homeless

BY MIKE RUPERT
Examiner Staff Writer

Even on a day when binge eating reigns supreme, the District's hungriest residents need what mothers have always called the "most important meal of the day."

Just before 7 a.m. Thursday, the sweet smell of French toast was wafting through the snow-dusted street outside of Miriam's Kitchen — a small open dining hall tucked away in the basement of the Western Presbyterian Church in Foggy Bottom.

John, who did not want to give his last name, was standing outside running a black comb through his long, wet hair and collecting his thoughts before heading down for breakfast. He had spent the night on a bench near Georgetown, he said, and was freezing.

Down in the nicely appointed hall, nearly 100 homeless people had already begun feasting on freshly made omelets, French toast, sausage, browned apples and fruit



Greg Whitesell/Examiner

From right to left, volunteer cooks Chris Garlock, Peter Lindsay and Lisa Garlock prepare breakfast for the homeless Thursday at Miriam's Kitchen, located in the basement of Western Presbyterian Church in Washington.

smoothies. Some chatted at tables; others found quiet places in a corner; others headed to the bathroom to clean up a little.

"We really let people just come in and get comfortable," said Scott Schenkelberg, the kitchen's executive director. "For many, this is the only meal they'll get all day."

But Schenkelberg and his crew of case managers do have other intentions.

"Everyone will get spoken to today," said Catherine Crum, director of social services. "Whether they speak back or not is up to them, but we want to make sure they know help is available."

MIRIAM'S KITCHEN AT A GLANCE

- Founded in 1983
- Serves breakfast to the homeless every weekday from 6:30 to 8 a.m.
- Served 48,040 meals in 2004
- Serves an average of 200 meals per day
- Provides legal, health and shelter assistance to homeless
- Nearly 75 percent of clients live on the streets

Aside from the food, prepared by former famed New York chef Steve Badt, the shelter also helps the homeless get the services they need, whether it's medicine, an identification card or even a bus token.

In 2004, 525 homeless residents obtained identification and Miriam's provided 3,070 bus tokens to help people get to a documented job or a legal or medical appointment. Miriam's also helped 263 guests obtain food stamps and other public benefits.

"We help them weave through the red tape," Schenkelberg said. "Some guests do not have a clue that they have a lot of assistance available to them."

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Miracle of Lights goes dark

BY CHRISTY GOODMAN
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The "Miracle of Lights" at Fairfax's Bull Run Regional Park, a metropolitan Washington favorite, will not be open for the 2005 holiday season.

The independent promoter of the annual light show, Events USA, recently told the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority that it was "unable to mount the production," according to the park authority.

"We're disappointed that the show won't happen this year," said Paul Gilbert, NVRPA director. "Unfortunately, we were informed too late in the season to seek another producer."

Gilbert said the show will be made a priority next year.

The 2-mile drive, featuring 250 light displays — such as Christmas in space and Noah's Ark — has attracted some 35,000 cars each year since 1997.

In the past, more than 300,000 light bulbs were used, requiring 475,000 watts of power and resulting in a \$10,000 electric bill.

Repeated calls to the promoter were not answered.

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Turkey Day with the meter down

BY KAREN DEWITT

Examiner Senior Correspondent

The popular holiday song "Over the River and Through the Woods" has it that "the horse knows the way to carry the sleigh" to Grandmother's house.

But on Thanksgiving Day, many use a taxicab to get there instead.

"We have people going and coming to the airports, buses, trains," a harried Yellow Cab dispatcher said early Thursday. "And everybody wants a cab now."

That's not surprising to Herbert Best, an official with Diamond Cab.

"Thanksgiving morning is the busiest part of the day, probably of the year," said Best, who also still drives a cab.

Best said that typical volume for the company is "800-plus calls ... but [on] Thanksgiving we hit over 1,500."

"It'll slack off after 1 [p.m.] and then pick back up for people coming home from dinner," said Best.

Many of the people taking cabs aren't headed to a train, plane or bus depot. Some take taxis to the traditional turkey dinner, either to the homes of relatives or friends or to restaurants, even as far as New York City.



AP file photo

"A lot of people who are just going for the day will take a cab," said Johnny Adeyemi, driver service manager for Barwood Taxi Inc. "People who are going for more than a day, they left Monday and Tuesday. But people who are just going for Thanksgiving dinner, especially old people, will take a cab."

Adeyemi remembered one such customer.

"Every Thanksgiving, we used to have an elderly lady who took a cab to Charleston, S.C.," said Adeyemi. "I drove her myself one time. She said she just loved to drive long distances."

Beverly Smith Walton isn't elderly — she's 42 — but she was packing Thanksgiving into the trunk of Abiyi Ayalem's taxi near Chevy Chase Circle for a trip to her sister's for dinner.

"I want to be able to relax and not worry about the streets, the weather or depending on someone else to drive me," said Walton.

"We're just like the police and hospitals," said Adeyemi. "We never close. The only day it's really slow is New Year's Day. Then you can walk across [Interstate] 270 because everyone who drank too much is still in bed."

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More top stories

Beware of holiday thieves, AAA warns

AAA Mid-Atlantic is warning holiday shoppers to beware of "parking lot prowlers" as the holiday shopping season gets under way. Consumers will flood shopping malls today, known as "Black Friday," and thieves will take advantage.

AAA says shoppers should keep valuables in the trunk, park in a well-lit place, have keys in hand when approaching the car and check the back seat before getting into the vehicle.

The auto club also warns consumers to be wary of identity theft, particularly "shoulder surfing," a new trend among thieves in which they use camera phones to photograph credit cards. — Anna Bailey

Botanic Garden launches holiday exhibit

The U.S. Botanic Garden's holiday exhibit, "Seasons Greetings from the National Mall," is now open. The exhibit features model trains running through a replica of the National Mall and miniature versions of the U.S. Capitol, the Washington Monument, the U.S. Botanic Garden Conservatory, town houses of Capitol Hill and Ford's Theatre. The exhibit runs through Jan. 8.

The U.S. Botanic Garden is located at 100 Maryland Ave. SW, Washington. For more information, call Jan Clark at 202-226-7674; e-mail jclark@aoc.gov; or visit www.usbg.gov. — Staff report

Gar-Field High School to hold craft show in Woodbridge

The Gar-Field High School Orchestra Boosters will hold its annual Holiday Craft Show from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturday, Dec. 10. The show will be held indoors at Gar-Field High School, 14000 Smoketown Road, Woodbridge, across from Potomac Mills Mall. Admission and parking are free.

The show features 120 crafters and artists who offer a variety of quality homemade craft and food items including candles, jewelry, woodwork, holiday decorations, candy, cheesecakes and quilts. Proceeds from the show help support the orchestra's program with instrument purchase and maintenance, music, concert expenses, awards and scholarships. — Staff report

D.C. fire investigators suspect arson in Northeast blaze

Arson is suspected in a fire that erupted at a Northeast residential mental treatment facility early Wednesday morning.

Firefighters were called to the 1800 block of Hamlin Street at about 3 a.m. and were able to rescue one person from a balcony and another through a stairwell, a fire department spokesman said. No one was seriously injured.

Fire investigators believe one of the facility's patients may have set the fire. — Mike Rupert