

CHARITY MEAL

IT FEEDS FELLOWSHIP

Queen City restaurant's annual People First event draws more in need than ever



LAUREN A. LITTLE — READING EAGLE

Glenn and Daphne Moyer enjoy lunch together with their neighbor and grandson during the People First dinner Tuesday at the Queen City Family Restaurant in Reading.

By Karen Shuey
Reading Eagle

This time last year, sitting down to a home-cooked meal seemed like a fantasy to Glenn and Daphne Moyer.

The couple were living out of a Pontiac Aztek using a portable heater to keep warm while the cold wind whipped outside — knowing that if they sought refuge at a shelter they would have to live apart from each other. That was their harsh reality for two years.

Unable to find steady work after suffering a serious heart condition and several surgeries, Glenn was forced to wait out the clock until he could apply for Social Security benefits. Daphne worked, but she made too little to afford an apartment. So they used her paycheck to keep their bellies full while they survived the best they could in their vehicle.

Dinner was often cold soup from a can.

Things have gotten better since then. In January, Glenn used a large portion of his Social Security funds to buy a mobile home in Exeter Township. But money is still tight. Really tight.

So they said they were beyond grateful when they re-



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Fred Schwerdt of Wyomissing serves meals.

ceived an invitation to Tuesday's People First event at Queen City Family Restaurant — grateful for the opportunity to enjoy a free meal and the feeling of normalcy during a time of turbulence. "This is the nicest thing I have ever seen people do for other people," Daphne said. "This is a true reflection of how much they care about the community," added Glenn.

The people they were re-

ferring to are the Elmarzouky family, the volunteers whizzing by their booth carrying trays full of food and the local businesses that had donated all the supplies that made the 11th annual event bigger than those of the past.

Each year, owner Elsayed Elmarzouky shuts down his restaurant to paying customers and plays host to those in need of a helping hand. He and his family in-

vite the downtrodden, the homeless and hungry to get fed and find fellowship. And this year, they expanded that invitation by distributing tickets to more than 30 agencies throughout Berks County.

"My dad wanted to send out 3,000 invitations this year," said general manager Sabrena Elmarzouky. "We didn't want to leave anyone out, so everything is twice as

PEOPLE'S PAGE 2

People

FROM PAGE 1

big. That means more food, more volunteers, more donations from the community.”

Jack Williams, executive director of the Berks County Coalition to End Homelessness, said the goal is to give everyone an opportunity to have a seat at the table.

“The people who come here need this,” he said. “There are people here who would never be able to afford a meal like this at a restaurant. Going out is something a lot of us take for granted, but an invitation like this can mean the world for others.”

‘Such a blessing’

Diane Ruth is one of them.

“This is such a blessing,” she said. “But to be honest I never thought I would find myself in this position. I was an executive secretary who had a nice paycheck. No one ever tells you that this could be what your life is like at the end.”

Ruth, 69, lives with her sister in the home they



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Maria Cook, a Queen City Family Restaurant employee, serves doughnuts during the People First dinner Tuesday at the Reading restaurant.

grew up in along Reading Boulevard. She said that living on a fixed income has forced her into choices

choosing like buying heating oil rather than paying to keep the lights on.

“I didn’t think I would

have to be picking and choosing like this at my age,” Ruth said. “And the thing is, there are a lot of

people like me. We don’t like to ask for help. We don’t want to be a burden on anyone.”

That’s why, she said, the People First event is so meaningful. She said it had been long time since she and her sister had eaten a meal out at a restaurant that didn’t have a Dollar Menu.

“This is a true gift,” she said.

Annual anticipation

Rhonda Kershner feels the same. While she lives in the city and is surrounded by people, she rarely gets to sit down at a restaurant with some friends. That’s why the People First event is an invitation she looks forward to each fall.

“I love this because I like to socialize,” she said.

Kershner, who has been diagnosed with a learning disability, spends most of her time alone in her apartment. She has a home care worker who helps keep her company during the day and on task, she said having a meal out at a restaurant is a treat.

“It’s nice to eat with other people,” she said. “It feels like family here.”

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