



Friendship Trays

Spring
2010

Meals on wheels in Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, NC www.friendshiptrays.org

Cooler in transit

Before summer, drivers will use insulated containers to protect food quality, safety

We're determined to make Friendship Trays an even cooler place. Cooler for the food, that is.

Since the April 2008 conversion to chilled meals on all home-delivered routes, drivers have taken food out in paper or foil bags, or their own coolers.

Testing has been ongoing for several months to find the most cost-effective system to ensure that food stays below 40° until it reaches the recipient.

By summer, says Executive Director Lucy Bush Carter, Friendship Trays will use insulated bags with gel ice packs or some other system to keep all food out of the danger zone.

Refrigerator thermostats have been turned down so trays leave South End as cool as possible.

Use of insulated containers may prompt other packaging changes.

One likely target is the Styrofoam flip-lid "clamshell" used for salads, bread, desserts, and the like. Clamshells are cheap, but they are not biodegradable.

Volunteers have long complained that clamshells flip open in transit. Recipients sometimes report salad dressing on their dessert.

Carter says two costs will shape the solutions: the initial capital cost of acquiring insulated carriers, and higher operating costs for alternative packaging.

Friendship Trays will encourage drivers to donate to cover the cost of the containers they use. The remaining cost of conversion will be financed out of an unanticipated 2009 bequest.

As for higher operating costs for packaging, Carter says: "I hate to add to our costs in the middle of this recession, but we simply must resolve this issue before it creates problems for us.

"We prepare food with great care. We need to be equally careful with its delivery."



An insulated bag used in temperature testing.

A month of pot-washing by hand

Bequest helps replace vital piece of kitchen equipment

Menus change. People come and go. But one constant in any commercial kitchen is the fiendishly expensive dishwashing equipment.

Potwasher Doreatha Blakeny knew of the dishwasher's long maintenance history. Installed in 1996, it had been in and out of intensive care for years. Everybody knew that the next breakdown might mean replacement.

So Blakeny had been proffering tender loving care to keep the machine going. When the machine developed a new noise in December, Blakeny said she'd give it time between loads to rest. And Executive Director Lucy Bush Carter began interviewing vendors about a right-sized replacement.

On a January morning, however, the end came in a shower of sparks that left no injuries but did leave a

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Doreatha Blakeny next to the new Champion dishwasher.

Our mission is built on your good-hearted spirit

The writer is board president of Friendship Trays.

By **SKIP GRIBBLE**

If you want to know the generous and supportive spirit of this city named Charlotte, spend a little time at Friendship Trays.

Come for a visit. Here's what you'll find.

On any given late morning, the Friendship Trays foyer will be bustling with volunteers. They come on their own. They come as part of a faith congregation. They come as part of a workplace team. They are here to deliver meals.

An individual you bump into while you are picking up meals may volunteer several times a week, or several times a month or even just several times a year. Schedules are flexible. Second Thursdays of the month? No problem.

Earlier in the day, the kitchen was full with from a handful to dozens of volunteers helping to package meals. There too, some are weekly stalwarts. Others come less frequently.

They are old. They are young. Yes, we have schoolchildren helping out some days. These are good-spirited people. They define Friendship Trays and they define our city. They are helping their neighbors by helping us provide nourishing, tasty, healthy food for those who cannot make their own meals.

And whom do we serve? On any given day there will be 700 or more people served. Some are tiny tots whose nonprofit preschools have contracted with Friendship Trays to provide the noontime meal. Dozens are disabled citizens living or gathering at group homes and other facilities throughout the community. Some of these residents, with their caregivers, turn around and help others by delivering routes themselves. We began serving adults at group homes when it became clear that it was an efficient way to reach many of the re-



Teens from the Eta Sigma Alpha home school honor society package meals in the Friendship Trays kitchen on Jan. 29.

ipients we might otherwise serve at their homes.

But the bulk of our recipients are ailing and elderly and live at home, often alone. They benefit from the food, of course. But recipients tell us that the short personal visit by a Friendship Trays driver is sometimes the high point of their day. And that improves health and sense of well-being.

Some recipients will receive meals for a short time. Others will be served for some years. Whether we serve them for a few weeks or longer, it's often the access to a nourishing meal that is the one thing that allows our neighbors to continue to live on their own. Aging in place is not just the most cost-effective way; it's the way all of us would prefer to have it.

Friendship Trays has grown from six recipients in 1976 because of the kind of community Charlotte-Mecklenburg has been and continues to be. It is a community in which thousands of people have become donors to support what is now a \$1.3 million budget. Unlike

some nonprofits, Friendship Trays has never had a single primary donor. Instead, we thrive on the support of hundreds of individuals making both large and small donations. We are blessed with foundation and faith community and corporate support. And we are building new revenue streams from fund-raisers and from rental of our commercial kitchen during the off-hours. Believe me, every donor makes a critical contribution to the success of our mission.

I've lived in Charlotte all my life, and it is a wonderful place. It's full of great people – and full of faith communities and corporations that mirror those great people's community values. The people of Charlotte-Mecklenburg care about one another. There's no better place to see that than at Friendship Trays.

I am privileged to take a hand in spreading the word about this great community resource called Friendship Trays, the primary meals-on-wheels provider in Charlotte-Mecklenburg.

If you'd like me to speak to your community group or congregation, please give me a call at Friendship Trays at 704-333-9229.



Gribble

Artwork in this edition

Our thanks to Charlotte Country Day School students, whose artwork first appeared on handmade cards that Friendship Trays sends out to recipients on their birthdays.

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Join us for cooking classes with a purpose

Don't let your children grow up thinking that carrots grow in a plastic bag. And don't believe you can't eat locally while thinking globally.

Friendship Trays announces "Cooking For The Friendship Table," a series of cooking classes for children and adults. Some classes will separate the age groups; others will combine them.

The series will introduce you to a variety of chefs, farmers and cooking instructors who share a focus on local, sustainable agriculture. The spice in the series will be from learning how the instructors contribute to the same goal using their very different training, tools

Cooking for the Friendship Table

and venues.

We'll introduce you to chefs who delight in fresh and crisp. And you'll hear from some of the area farmers who are harvesting fresh and crisp in the Metrolina area.

Details on dates, times and speakers will be posted in the Friendship Trays website as they become available.

Net proceeds from cooking class tuition fees will support all the hunger-fighting efforts concen-

trated in the 2401 Distribution Street building by helping to pay for building maintenance and kitchen equipment replacement.

"We will continue to focus donor dollars on delivering nutritious meals to those who cannot prepare meals for themselves, instead of paying to keep the kitchen equipment going," said Executive Director Lucy Bush Carter. "That's good stewardship, for a lot of reasons."

Details on the classes will be posted at friendshiptrays.org. To reserve a place in the classes and for other questions, call Lani Lawrence at 704-333-9229 or e-mail her at llawrence@friendshiptrays.org.

Less is more

Sorry, Dumpster divers: Waste stream dwindling

Cardboard boxes were first to go. Then the big empty food cans were diverted. And now the kitchen scraps are going to the worms!

Friendship Trays has been cooperating with neighboring businesses to reduce waste streams. And there are results to report:

The Friendship Trays bin that used to be emptied twice a week is now being emptied only once a week.

Led by landlord and Friendship Trays benefactor Bruce Parker, a number of businesses qualified for the county's Small Business Recycling Drop-Off Program.

Parker Medical provided space for the blue recycling bin. Cardboard and paper products can now be deposited. The list of acceptable recyclables may be about to grow.

Recycling the kitchen's big No. 10 cans is a work in progress.

Kitchen staffers clean and bag empty cans, and a volunteer carries them to a recycling center. On Friendship Trays' wish list is a large (and expensive) can crusher.

And what about the kitchen scraps? Today, they're all diverted



into a compost bin. There, red wiggler worms munch on the scraps, along with shredded paper and

leaves, to produce worm castings (let's call it worm poop) that will become a nutrient-rich dressing for the vegetable garden.

The worms do their work in a bin donated by Slow Food Charlotte, the group collaborating on development of the Friendship Garden. The garden adjoining Friendship Trays aims to expand the amount of local produce for use in Friendship Trays meals, and to demonstrate the power of partnerships and recycling.

To delay a move to assisted living, the health care worker had moved her aunt into her own home. But she was at her wit's end about her aunt's nutrition while she was at work.

And so she explained the new rule to her aunt: No matter how hard it is, no matter what kind of day you're having, you MUST get up and go to the door when the Friendship Trays driver arrives. No exceptions.

Route directions often warn drivers about recipients known to be slow-moving to the door. But health rules prohibit leaving the food unless a cooler has been left outside.

So as niece and aunt talk, there are no threats. For both women



— Elizabeth

know the stakes:

If the aunt doesn't get up to receive the meals, there will be no alternative but another move, this time to institutional care.



April: An idle plot is cleared. Dirt and lumber are donated. And the first plants take root.



May: As vegetables begin to grow, Slow Food Charlotte installs a rain-water collection system.



June: Schoolchildren learn about planting and composting, and leave the garden a more colorful place.



July: Basil, okra, tomatoes, peppers and eggplant are harvested.

Year One and beyond in the Friendship Garden

A Q&A with Garden Coordinator Henry Owen

Garden Coordinator Henry Owen is teacher, coordinator, planner and heavy lifter for the Friendship Garden project.

Q If it's a demonstration garden, what are you demonstrating?

A First, that even folks who did not grow up gardening can learn how. Second, that gardens can put vacant urban spaces to good use to feed people. And third, that your group, or your family, can get started and have enough success right out of the box to feel that the time was well spent.

Q How will Year Two in the Distribution Street garden be different from Year One?

A We're getting an earlier start, and we have a better plan. Last year we depended on donations of plants. This year we're sprouting seeds.

And we're being guided by the Culinary School folks, who told us that they would really value having quick access to fresh herbs. So

the garden will be more herbs this year.

Q How would you distinguish the gardens Friendship Trays wants to encourage, from those created at county park sites?

A Reedy Creek is an example of a community garden. The space is cut up into plots where individuals grow vegetables for their own use. Now, I believe that volunteers will burn out quickly if they don't get to share in the results of their labor. But we're looking, particularly at the "flagship garden" that we envision, to create a space where volunteers from all walks of life mingle and collaborate in the work, and where the harvest goes to put more locally grown, fresh produce into the diets of Friendship Trays recipients.

Q What's the flagship project?

A We'd like to find, in the city if possible, a plot of a couple of acres where the landowner will agree to have us use the plot for gardening on an ongoing basis, and not throw us off when they're ready to start a development.

The plot would operate more as a farm. And we'd like it to be in the city so more people can see it, learn

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Owen



August: Beans grow while the sweet potato plants spread out.



September: Slow Food volunteers and contractors transform the space.



October: The garden dresses up for gala evening fund-raiser.



Ready for 2010 season: Weedy back lot becomes outdoor gathering place, while teaching skills and witnessing to the benefits of urban agriculture.



November: Radishes are harvested for use in the kitchen.



December: Rain and occasional frost close out the calendar year

from it, and learn in it.

Q You're working with students of the Community Culinary School of Charlotte. What's that about?

A It's about broadening their culinary training to include lots of hands-on activity related to plants, garden layout and composting.

So far, each class has had a different experience. I've met with the current class every Tuesday, sometimes in the garden and sometimes in the classroom. We've done a lot with composting, and we planted seeds.

The next class will have more hands-on work with planting and growing.

Q Who are your partners now?

A We continue to partner with Slow Food Charlotte, a group

whose volunteers helped develop the Friendship Garden on Distribution Street.

We're growing seedlings in the greenhouse at Hope Haven on North Tryon Street that will be planted at the Urban Ministries Center and the Friendship Garden. Hope Haven had extra space they were not using. But the greenhouse work has brought the three agencies together, and I'm excited about what might develop. We're talking to Matthews Presbyterian about helping them start a garden.

We're also talking to folks at Moore Place, which will house previously homeless people in apartments, then wrap services around them. One of the things being discussed for Moore Place is a garden where volunteers and the residents

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January: Slow Food Charlotte donates heated Wigwam. Red wigglers take up residence.



February: Culinary School students plant seeds.



March: After one last winter storm, buds open and bulbs seek the sun.

Hunger-fighting benefactor to match gifts made by April 30

Donate to Friendship Trays by April 30 and your gift will bring some matching money from a Rhode Island foundation.

Alan Shawn Feinstein, a philanthropist, former teacher and financial columnist, is in the middle of his 13th giveaway of \$1 million to groups that fight hunger.

Participating groups nationwide receive proportional shares of the \$1 million based on what they raise between March 1 and April 30. More than 1,700 groups participated in 2009, raising \$197 million.

As more groups have joined the

Challenge since 1998, the total dollars that Feinstein has helped raise to fight hunger have grown,



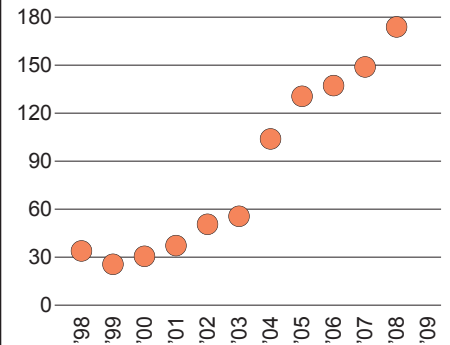
Feinstein

while the amounts that individual agencies have received from him have dropped. But who's complaining?

Your donation today will mean a few extra resources to feed those in Charlotte-Mecklenburg who cannot make their own meals.

Donate by check that we receive before April 30, or donate right now via JustGive.org.

Donations to participating nonprofits, in millions, by year, according to the Feinstein Foundation.



Garden

Continued from Page 5

can work together on growing vegetables for the residents and for Friendship Trays. You know, it's a lot easier to get to know people who are different from you if you have a shared task to accomplish.

In the long run, I'd like to see a group of volunteers willing to help lend a hand whenever a group around town wants to get a garden started. They'd help the host group assess the site, plan the project, provide access to educational materials, then help boost their labor pool during those initial weeks when there's lots to do to get a garden up and running.

Q Has the recession made it easier to find volunteers?

A Most of the people involved in the last year are busy folks with jobs. They're just committed to this work. A few either have been out of work, or have someone supporting them so they have extra time to volunteer.

But, yes, this may have been the optimal time for this push to spread gardening throughout the city.

Q Are you planting vegetables, or a revolution?

A We want fresh produce because

Did you have a good day?
If you didn't have a good
day have it tomorrow!

— Peter

Mom sat silently, keeping her worry to herself as the 30-year-old, brain-injured son spoke for himself.

His basketball-playing days are over, he agrees. But he's happy living alone in the sparsely furnished apartment. And, despite his limited physical capacities, he treasures his independence.

A price for that independence has been paid by Mom, who has been carrying meals for some

time.

The interview is over. Son will be added to a Friendship Trays route. He expresses thanks. Not just for the food. The meals, he says, would ease Mom's load, and he appreciates that.

A mother's tears flowed. She was of course proud of her son's fierce determination to be more self-sustaining. But she had also heard the appreciation of a grateful son.

it will help Friendship Trays recipients with their diets.

But we're also interested in changing how people view their own food, because what they're eating affects their health too. A consistent form of exercise is good for all of us.

And I believe there are community benefits from having people

working together toward a common goal who did not know one another before they began their shared task.

So I'd guess I'd say we want to plant vegetables, and a revolution too. Both are part of re-visioning how we live in the city, what we eat, how we spend some of our time and how we relate to others.



Mike, Jason and Craig from C.E. Holt Refrigeration installed the new dishwasher on Feb. 22. Sherwood Lapping, the general contractor who renovated the warehouse for Friendship Trays in 1996, returned with a crew to remove a door frame to allow the dishwashers in and out of the kitchen.



Dishwasher

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lot of people washing pots and pans and knives and spatulas by hand for about 30 days.

Carter said the extensive inquiry with vendors about dishwasher load limits and rinse flows led her to settle on a \$30,000 Champion washer nearly identical to one installed when the Distribution Street warehouse was upfitted for Friendship Trays' kitchen.

"That told me a lot about the wisdom of the people who put this facility together," Carter said.

But how to pay for it?

Just a few weeks before the dishwasher became unusable, Carter received a call from a lawyer. His news: Friendship Trays had been named in a will, and what address should the check be mailed to?

The check became the largest single unanticipated, out-of-the-blue donation in the history of Friendship Trays.

The bequest has helped Friendship Trays meet an immediate financial challenge. The gift will soon be tapped to assist in a critical conversion to protect food on its way to recipients (Story, Page 1.)

The remainder of the gift will continue to support Friendship Trays' work for months or years to come.

He left the hospital on oxygen 24/7 – not a good mix with the gas stove in his westside home. Physically trim but with damaged lungs and vocal cords, his efforts to speak were labored. But the bumper sticker on the car that might not have moved for years spoke volumes: "Retired Airborne."

Outreach Coordinator David Blough normally collects a two-week advance payment before recipients join the program. He had not done so with this recipient. Re-reading the papers he had just signed, the recipient noticed the oversight, and questioned Blough: I didn't do this part, he whispered.

"If I can't trust someone from the Airborne, I can't trust anyone," Blough replied.

The elderly man stood a bit taller, and Blough departed.



– Clement

The 16th Annual Driving Away Hunger Golf Tournament

May 3, 2010 Carolina Golf Club Charlotte



This is the ONE charity outing you don't want to miss

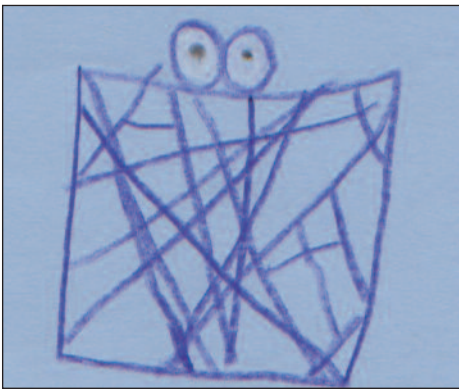
The venue is one of the most historic golf courses in North Carolina. It was designed by famed Scottish golf course architect Donald Ross about 80 years ago. And now it's been renovated by Kris Spence. It is the only time this year Carolina Golf Club will host a tournament for an area nonprofit.

The golfer who makes a hole-in-one at the designated hole wins a new Hyundai Genesis Coupe.

And then there is this. Of all the charity events you are asked to participate in, this is THE one you don't want to miss because:

May 3 is the largest single fundraising event for Friendship Trays, Charlotte-Mecklenburg's meals-on-wheels program.

This volunteer-driven mission may serve your parents, or your neighbors. Volunteer drivers deliver a nutritious meal, but also make sure that each recipient is OK. Family members across town or across the country know that someone is looking in on their loved one. Your afternoon on the golf course will help support this



– Connor

work throughout the year.

Prizes will be awarded for first, second, and third low net scores and one prize will be awarded for the low gross score. The format will be a four-player modified captain's choice scramble.

And during the awards dinner we'll be raffling off some fabulous gift items. New this year: You can increase your chances of winning your favorite item by placing all

your tickets in the drawing for that item. Or you can spread your tickets around. Either way, your raffle ticket purchases will support a great cause.

So join us on May 3. To reserve your place, download the registration on our website, www.friendshiptrays.org, and mail it in by Monday, April 19.

For more information, please call Friendship Trays at 704-333-9229.

He lived in world-class Charlotte, but the holes in the mobile home floor were big enough to swallow an ankle. And this man was definitely a fall risk.

Should he stay at home? Department of Social Services investigators thought he could: He had rearranged furniture so he could hold on to something wherever he walked. There is immense power in the will to remain independent.

And so Friendship Trays delivered meals to this man. Until the day the firetruck and ambulance and three patrol cars came to the mobile home.

Despite his best efforts, he had fallen. An officer said the ambulance had taken him to the hospital for treatment of big contusions. He had not fallen through the floor. Just fallen.

Since the fall, he has not returned to the mobile home with the hole in the floor. His care will now be far more expensive.

Keeping people in their homes as long as that is possible is not just the most cost-effective care. It's where most people want to be. Your donations help make that possible.



– Lawson