

Social and civic entrepreneurship: Case study of a “rain-drenched” feast

Facts & Figures

2008 Festival of Potluck Foods—by the number 13

Resources Unlimited reports 24 “results” of the 13th potluck festival on the 13th of September, hosted at and by Ascension Church of Oak Park.

1. 52 potluck dishes brought and enjoyed.
2. Two welcoming tables, five filled tables of main foods and desserts, and 13 sit-down tables of eight, ten, and 12 feasters each.
3. 208 (13 x 16) ceramic plates used, washed, repacked.
4. 169 (divisible by 13 exactly 13 times) cloth napkins used from a total of—we kid you not—313 napkins on loan from two food-service purveyors.
5. The print version of the invitation listed a grand partnership of 133 and said the feast is gratefully brought “by an amazing association of neighbors and institutions”: sponsors, co-hosts, donors, volunteers. Thank you!
6. Seven arrangements of fresh-cut flowers, 26 potted plants borrowed from Garfield Terrace Condo Association and Oak Park Conservatory, along with 13 colorful plates of fresh organic fruits to eat or take home—lemons, oranges, apples, grapes, *etc.*, scented with local fresh mint.
7. Notwithstanding a near-constant deluge of rain area-wide, 18 of 21 planned performance sets arrived to bring gifts of music, singing, dancing, and dramatics vocal, taken from history or contemporary styles of entertainment play.
8. Seven performers from area high schools; plus two international professors of music from Ecuador, playing three light selections of Latino “mood music to eat by.”
9. Three tables of three representative art works by three artists:
(a) Columbia College Chicago student and Oak Park resident David Saunders, displaying original animation art depicting Disney characters Minnie the Mocher and Betty Boop. **(b)** Octogenarian Jean Morman Unsworth, an avowedly Catholic artist, painter, and fashion designer, whose current *Retrospective Exhibit in Multi Media* (including textile arts) opened a week earlier at the Doerderlein Gallery of St. Luke Evangelical Lutheran Church, in the Chicago Lakeview neighborhood. **(c)** “Glocal” artists Charlene Engler and spouse Tom Vignola, living on S. East Avenue, two blocks from the Ascension campus. While not members of a house of worship, they displayed “Renaissance-style” paintings of contemporary religious and secular subjects, notably the dome of Ascension Church and its altogether Romanesque architectural structure.
10. “Extra”: One South American artist and sculptor, preferring anonymity, displayed a stone carving, done in a Peruvian style of earthy harvest colors, depicting the 13 gathered at the biblical “Last Supper.”
11. Thirteen helpers in the moment, identified as such at a subsequent debriefing.
12. Two transportation vehicles loaned, for movement of goods and people. The loan of equipment represented a savings of, yes, \$1,300, making for a best-ever-in-13-years ratio of event expenses to revenue.

13. Name unknown, one helper came early for set-up and asked to work. He quietly executed 13 or more tasks (those we noticed!). Later that day organizers learned his name—Armstrong Mason, Jr. He helped move an awkward and heavy wooden stage to the Ascension school gym. He also delicately pinned up tablecloths.

14. At the ready for post-feast disassembling was the “After Party Team” of 13 movers and shakers—handlers of clean-up tasks large and small. Completion took 52 minutes total, just in time for the Ascension 5 p.m. Saturday evening Mass—a communion worship service (“Eucharist”).

15. Not accounted here: Total savings realized from a practical, fun strategy of using all possible human (and financial) resources, to reveal a grassroots model for reducing costs of an annual feasting experience, during tough (and getting tougher) economic times of tight money.

16. Present: Elected officials, plus a fair sampling of civically active elders, along with a dozen or more younger progressives and conservatives.

17. Guests without a home or email address, including the “infamous” dreadlocked Ray.

18. More than a half-dozen family folk of three or four members each family.

19. Clergy members of one or other faith tradition or denomination.

20. CEOs of varied institutions or organizational entities, or civic leaders who similarly identified as spearheading one or another community project of growth and change.

21. Parishioners met from other area houses of worship and from social justice and social welfare service groups and organizations, bringing hopeful smiles of helpfulness, affirmation, true grit.

22. Not numbered: “Festival-ites” who did their own “calculating” of guests, or who variously helped. Happenings of welcome or goodwill often were instances (really, instantiations) of generosity and abundance. God alone knows the priceless number.

23. Given near-constant downpours of rain that Saturday afternoon and weekend, there were justifiably felt and vocalized feelings of fullness, of gratitude in amplitude—gratitude to God, community, and everyone involved however. All made a house full of feast success. Thank you!

24. Never mind, Rain! Miracles happen in our day, say a few of the happenings listed above, at the 13th potluck festival on the 13th of September. Dishes brought to the indoor picnic dinner were, well, enticing, welcoming, often warm to the touch. Easy smiles abounded. An unspoken rule of “taste and see wonderful foods” was a sign of neighbors at one, at peace.

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