

Soup kitchen receives over \$18,000 in updates

By Leigh Tauss / Special to the Record-Journal

MERIDEN — Saturday will be like Christmas for the Meriden Soup Kitchen, having received a major donation from the John G. Martin Foundation to update several necessary pieces of equipment, whose value and installation cost will total more than \$18,000.

The soup kitchen is a non-profit organization located at the First Baptist Church, 460 Broad St. Founded in 1983, the kitchen served over 40,000 meals in 2013, according to the website.

Soup kitchen president Tim Granucci said the kitchen serves an average of 180 people five days a week, some days serving up to 240. The kitchen is entirely dependent on grants, donations, volunteers and gifts for funding. Granucci said with the organization's current income, it would have taken more than 5 years to raise enough money for the updates.

The kitchen will be receiving a large restaurant-style refrigerator, steel shelving and a sanitizing dishwasher.

"We'd been limping along for several years with what we had," said Granucci.

The current shelving is made of plastic, which sags in the middle making it hard to keep canned goods upright. The bottom shelf rests on the floor, which makes it very difficult to clean underneath it. The sink used to wash the larger pots and pans is too small and many of the volunteers find it hard to wash the unwieldy pots.

The kitchen has several small refrigerators designed for home use, which can barely hold the large volume of food produced. Additionally, in the process of loading and unloading the food the refrigerators are not able to stay cold enough to keep the food at the desired temperature.

Granucci explained how the updates would be a major upgrade for the kitchen. The new steel shelving will be sturdier than the plastic shelves, and much easier to clean. The dishwasher will not only be able to accommodate the larger dishware, but is also environmentally friendly, capable of sanitizing the dishes using less than a gallon of hot water per load. Finally, the refrigerator will be able to hold much larger quantities of food, and keep them cool throughout the day.

"To have a gift of this magnitude is incredible," said Granucci.

The donation was made possible by former Mayor Michael S. Rohde and Linda Owsianik, board member for the John G. Martin Foundation, a non-profit foundation with a mission to fund projects that improve communities in the Hartford area. The foundation voted unanimously to fund the soup kitchen on June 19th.

"It's really wonderful to be able to fund them," Owsianik said.

Rohde said, "they didn't ask for it and they never expected it," calling the effort merely the serendipity of the right people being the right place.

The new equipment is scheduled to be installed Saturday.

"Come Monday morning we're going to be ready to roll and serve the hungry of Meriden," Granucci said.

Rohde said the soup kitchen is one of the great unheralded organizations in the city. "I don't know of any group this year who's out there every single week, 52 weeks a year," said Rohde. "Without them I don't know where these people would go, they really depend on the soup kitchen for at least one meal a day."

The soup kitchen serves lunch Monday through Friday from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Over 125 regular volunteers work together to cook, clean and serve the food every week. Those interested in volunteering can get more information at www.meridensoupkitchen.org.