

AROUND TOWN

Photographs by ADRIAN LAM Times Colonist



Patricia O'Byrne, Don Evans and Peter Papagiannis.



Barb Desjardins, Eddie Mack and Le-Ann Dolan.



Tracy Campbell, Bernice Kamano, Dean Noble and Carole James.

Giving thanks at Our Place

Community dinner an annual treat for the less fortunate



MICHAEL D. REID

mreid@timescolonist.com

Turkey, mashed potatoes, vegetables, cranberry sauce and pumpkin pie weren't the only things on the menu at Our Place on Thursday.

So was social justice, a hot topic among local politicians when they weren't talking turkey while serving Thanksgiving meals to Victoria's less fortunate with other community volunteers and staff.

"Social justice is very important to me, making sure we have a city that doesn't leave anyone behind," said Victoria Mayor Dean Fortin, joined by city councillors Pam Madoff, Ben Isitt, Chris Coleman, Shellie Gudgeon, Marianne Alto, Geoff Young, Charlayne Thornton-Joe and mayoral hopeful Lisa Helps. "It's great to see so many people supporting that concept."

They were among dozens of volunteers of all political stripes, including NDP MLA Carole James, Oak Bay Mayor Nils Jensen and Esquimalt Mayor Barb Desjardins.

"I'm from a big family so serving dinners is what I do," smiled Desjardins, looking decidedly domestic scurrying about in a white apron, plates in hand. "This makes you realize how truly blessed we are."

John Ducker, former VicPD deputy chief and chair of Our Place's social justice committee, said he learned a valuable lesson.

"I realize I could never work in a restaurant," said Ducker, who is running for mayor in Esquimalt. "But I feel really good being able to help people get through difficult times in their life."

While servers from the capital region's many municipalities might have ideological differences, politics were off the table.

"No matter who is running for mayor or councils, they're all here to recognize some people are in less fortunate situations than ourselves," said Fortin.

Mama Bear, 59, a prominent Our Place family member known for her warmth, smiles and hugs whose portrait hangs in the dining room expressed gratitude for the family celebration.

"I've been coming to this place since its grand opening, when Rev. Al [Tysick] asked me to do a speech," she said. "A lot of homeless people out there don't get many meals like this, so when we have this and the one here on Sunday [local businessman and philanthropist Gordie



Grant McKenzie poses with Mama Bear, a prominent Our Place family member.



Barb Desjardins picks up plates as Larry Pedersen, left, helps tidy up during the Thanksgiving luncheon.



Former VicPD deputy chief John Ducker serves loaded plates for an appreciative crowd.



Marilyn Rice serves the pumpkin pies.



Jan Drent serves food to Fred Iuon and Karol Farley.