

Volunteer News

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Volunteer!

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Celebrating 20 years of Potluck Volunteers



At the Park Sunday, July 10, left-to-right: David Utzinger (19+years). Larry Gilmore (15yr), Hal Bernton (9yr), Tania (1yr+), Mario (20yr), Brent Filler (1yr), Denise Williams (11yr), Julius Brown (8yr), Eva (1yr+), John Pigott (9yr), Ray Crawford (9yr). Behind them is "Big Green" (16yr).

Mario and a group of homeless friends sat talking on a stone circle in the South Park Blocks one sunny August Sunday in 1991. Sharon Darcy and several of her friends walked up with small pots of home-cooked food. "Are you hungry" Sharon asked. Yes, they were hungry. Fifteen Guests shared the meal that first Sunday. "Sharon said to tell all our friends to come back next Sunday," Mario remembers. The weekly Potluck meal Sharon founded is now serving 400-600 Guests. and Mario is a regular volunteer with Sharon's successors. The secret to the staying power of Potluck is the story of its people. Here, we'll celebrate some Park regulars...

"Are you hungry?" Sharon asked. Yes, Mario and his friends were hungry.

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About four months after that first Sunday, Sharon recruited **David** at a political event. Potluck didn't use a truck for the first few years, storing equipment near the Park Blocks instead. David was involved in securing the donation of both the first truck, and the current "Big Green" van in 1995. David has worn many hats for Potluck. He is currently the driver, and the Logistics Coordinator at the Park.

Christ Church Episcopal Parish Volunteers cooked for Potluck from the beginning (see story inside). In 1996, about the time Potluck moved from the Park Blocks to Terry Shrunken Plaza and then to O'Bryant Square, **Larry** began volunteering at the "CCP" kitchen. "We started with a casserole called "Shepherd's Pie" which had the mashed potatoes (supplied by WCI) on the bottom," Larry remembers. "We did not realize the potatoes had a lot of cream and as we started to serve it the mashed potatoes had turned to more of a soup; which we started calling 'Shepherd's Soup,' and which people also liked."

Denise was a homeless Guest in 2000, when she offered to help take tickets at the Square. Potluck's "Ticket Lady" now has a home, and the afghan throw she is holding will be her third annual hand-crafted contribution to Potluck's Winter Warm Auction (December 4th this year).

Three of our Food Service Supervisors joined the team in 2002: **John** was invited by a lady he met at Church; **Hal** also heard about Potluck from a friend. **Ray**, a Guest at the time, was in a treatment program near the Square and volunteered to help David set up the tables every week. When the job of Cold Food Supervisor opened up, Ray stepped in. He directs Volunteers serving fruit, bread and pastries. Settled in West Portland, Ray is kept busy by four grandsons.

The next year, **Julius** came to eat and stayed to talk to Denise. He started his volunteer career with Potluck helping to unload Big Green, as Ray did. Julius stuck with the truck, however, and now works with David as Logistics Supervisor. Our Park "Quarterback," he keeps the operation running smoothly. Two of the ladies above came to Potluck from different directions in early 2010. **Tania** started serving with her PSU Global Healing class, and is one of several students who return regularly to volunteer on their own. **Eva**, a Guest, offered to help one Sunday, and now fills in anywhere across the Park as needed, including food supervision. Eva and Mario are both fluently bilingual, ready to help our Spanish-speaking Guests. A longtime volunteer serving the needy, **Brent** had been looking for a new weekend opportunity when he was led to Potluck by Mother's Kitchen, a local service group. (Several other "MK" members are active at Potluck.) Brent's first job as a Potluck Volunteer was cooking corn at last year's Anniversary BBQ.

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*"It's easy to see the human condition through the lens of poverty when one volunteers at Potluck."
Brent Filler, Mother's Kitchen and Potluck Volunteer*