

Students help make Empty Bowl fundraiser a success

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Bowls are filled with soup during the Empty Bowls fundraiser at the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano in Fairfield, Saturday, Oct. 13, 2018. (Aaron Rosenblatt/Daily Republic)

Soup is served during the Empty Bowls fundraiser at the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano in Fairfield, Saturday, Oct. 13, 2018. (Aaron Rosenblatt/Daily Republic)

FAIRFIELD — The Empty Bowls fundraising dinner Saturday for the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano has grown over the past two years, thanks to the help of some teens from the community.

Olivia Frenkel of Rodriguez High School and Alec Merodio of Armijo High School assisted in serving the dinner a couple of years ago as part of the Suisun Valley 4-H.

“We saw that the event could be improved and made better,” Frenkel said.

Updating the marketing materials was first on the agenda.

“They had a flier that showed this stock image of a bowl,” Merodio said. “But the thing is that the college creates and donates these amazing and unique bowls.”

The ceramic bowls made by Solano Community College art students covered three tables Saturday at the food bank’s warehouse in Fairfield.

“The bowls each year have these color schemes,” Merodio said. “One year it was blue and this year it’s browns and reds and earth tones.”

One of Merodio’s relatives taught them how to take photographs and then how to create fliers. The fliers are sent out to the media, businesses and are handed out.

Some attendees take the bowls home each year as a reminder that people are going hungry right here at home. Others came for the first time and admired the workmanship of the bowls before they got up to taste one of the four soups and bread being served.

“We also added a raffle and auction,” Frenkel said.

The Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano helps hundreds of thousands of people each year put food on the table for at least one good meal. The Empty Bowls fundraiser brings in money to help with the holiday season at the food bank.

“It has been amazing how much this has grown with their help,” said Larry Sly, the food bank’s executive director. “They have gone to the Soroptimists, the City Council and school board to make this happen.”

The difference is dramatic, he said, with about 40 to 50 people coming to the event a few years ago. The event sold out this year, with more than 200 people attending.

“It is because of the kids,” Sly said. “This is great for us because they understand how the media works and ways to get the message out.”

The food bank feeds 182,000 people per month by dropping food off at specific businesses or food pantries.

“It is about 92 sites we deliver to,” Sly said.

A few years ago they did a hunger study for the two counties and what they found shocked them.

“With people having to spend 50 percent of their money on housing, something had to give, and it was giving with food,” he said.

Sly knows getting food from a food bank, even if it is 20 to 30 pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables, isn't the same as shopping for their own food.

“We can make a difference and connect people with what they need,” he said.