

By Joel Jacobson BRIGHT SPOT

THE AROMAS from the kitchen are tantalizing. I can smell fish baking, turnip boiling and a lemon sauce for cake being heated.

By 11:30 on this Wednesday morning, the dozen volunteers preparing the meal and setting up tables and chairs have just about completed their tasks.

The first people arrive at Fairview United Church hall for the weekly seniors luncheon, an extremely successful program that has been running for 14 years.

Julia Henman takes the bus from her Sybil Court home each Wednesday to enjoy the camaraderie and food. She was at one of the first luncheons in 1986.

“The social part is so nice,” she says. “There are only a few of us left from 1986 but I’ve made a lot of new friends. And I certainly can’t make a meal for the \$3.50 they charge.”

Harriett (Hattie) MacKenzie is also an original. “When I first came, they only charged \$2 and there were only 25 of us. You could get second helpings,” she smiled. “You don’t prepare a meal like this at home, especially if you’re alone. I’ll cook a larger meal and then have leftovers for a few days. This is much better than leftovers.”

Today, there are about 60 diners, plus a volunteer crew of 20. The early crew cooks, sets up and serves. Volunteers who arrive just prior to dinner help serve and clean up.

“All the volunteers are retired people,” says Marion Clarke, who has chaired the program almost from its inception. She just recently handed the reins to Helen Stevenson and Bertha Goodick but still is an extremely active participant.

“We have the same 25 people who help week after week,” she says.

Laughter comes from the kitchen. “The same crew always does the cooking because they enjoy it so much. They also enjoy each others company. I think we like putting this together as much as the seniors love to come here.”

Seniors come from all over the city to this lunch program, even though there are other weekly seniors lunches at various sites. The volunteers are from Fairview United and two local Roman Catholic churches - St. Pius and St. Lawrence.

People reserve their spots although drop-ins are welcome. “For a time, we had to cut off at 130 people,” Clarke says, “but lately we’ve served between 60 and 80 people a week.”

For most diners. it’s an outing. Many will participate in some activity in the morning and then come to lunch. Others will go to St. Pius for afternoon card games and tea.

Les Eldridge, a retired salesman and later an apartment doorman and self-described amateur psychologist, is the food buyer.

“I have special places to buy fish, chicken and beef. But I study the grocery ads each

week and go where the specials are. I love to grocery shop.”

He helps set up, clean up and, if there is a shortage in kitchen staff, works there, too.

“I’m a good peeler but I’m good at cleaning pots, too,” he laughs.

Les Beanlands and his wife, Kaye, arrive from their Tantallon home near noon. They’re part of the serving and cleanup crew. But, as a younger retiree, Les is recruited to lift the massive pot of potatoes from the stove and mash them. He also tackles the turnip when it’s ready.

Clarke gets everyone’s attention at noon when the seniors are anxious for lunch.

“For the first time in history, the vegetables aren’t ready,” she announces. A slight groan is heard but she softens the blow by saying the turnip will be ready in about 10 minutes.

“We didn’t want to overcook them but when the time came to start them, we forgot to turn on the stove,” she confesses to laughter.

The seniors forgive the oversight and continue chatting with their neighbours. They can wait, for they know a nutritious and delicious lunch is on the way.

“This is a non-profit operation,” says Clarke. “Anything we make helps pay the church’s utilities or goes to kitchen supplies.”

Now, if you’ll excuse me, my baked haddock, potatoes, peas and turnip has been served.

Friday, a national service organization celebrates a century of giving

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