

Franklin rep says he won't resign after arrest for alleged 'revenge porn' — see page 6

The Laconia Daily Sun

WEEKEND

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FREE

Volunteers feed the need for Thanksgiving in the Lakes Region

By BOB MARTIN
THE LACONIA DAILY SUN

Whether an in-house traditional turkey dinner, or a holiday basket with all the fixins' to take home, Lakes Region residents have plenty of options for free Thanksgiving meals.

Local businesses, nonprofits and churches are doing their part to ensure people are fed and enjoy company for the holiday.

Laconia

The Congregational Church of Laconia has been serving food free of charge for Thanksgiving for 58 years, and what started as a spot to dine with friends and family has evolved into a takeout experience.

The late Hazel Duke was an elementary school teacher and member of the church congregation, and believed nobody should be without food on Thanksgiving. After she died, the church honored her by providing a free meal, and that has continued for nearly six decades.

Since the COVID pandemic, the church has opted to serve food to be taken home. Organizer Hollis Thompson said there will be signs at the church for patrons to follow to pick up their meal. She said it will be served hot and ready to eat, but if it needs to be re-heated, it can be done in the compostable container it comes in.

It will be a classic Thanksgiving meal with turkey, stuffing, a

see **THANKSGIVING** page 12



From row, from left, Karen Fortin, Sue Gendron and Dick Pease, and back row from left, Eric Phelps and Ernie Gault, unload hundreds of turkeys on Friday at St. Vincent de Paul in Laconia, in preparation for the distribution of Thanksgiving meal baskets on Saturday, Nov. 22, and Monday, Nov. 24. (Bob Martin/The Laconia Daily Sun photo)

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THANKSGIVING from page 1

vegetable, mashed potatoes, a slice of pie, water and plasticware. Thompson said it will be delicious, and she expects about 200 meals to be served on Thursday, Nov. 27.

"There are so many people who truly need something like this," Thompson said. "It's a nice warm meal that they don't have to cook, and some people don't even really have the means to cook a big turkey."

She said the group of about 25 volunteers feels the same way, noting many make this an annual event to give back.

"People always want to volunteer," she said. "Anytime you get together in a kitchen cooking, there is so much camaraderie."

The food is all donated by church and community members, and she admitted that this year, it was a little harder for everyone due to the economy.

"Everyone appreciates it immensely," she said. "We would love to serve 2,000 if we could."

The Congregational Church of Laconia is at 18 Veterans Square in Laconia.

Veterans in Laconia can go to the VFW 1670 for a free meal. It starts at 2 p.m., and doors will open at noon on Thanksgiving. The organization is asking for donations and desserts for the cause. Food will be provided for veterans and their families.

Isaiah 61 Café will be holding a

"Friendsgiving" after Thanksgiving, at 4:30 p.m. on Wednesday, Dec. 3.

Ray Boelig, who oversees the breakfast program at Isaiah 61, said it is always a "big splash" in terms of attendance. He said it will be open to all their friends who visit the cafe, along with volunteers and their family members. He said the dinner is being held after Thanksgiving, because other organizations are holding their own meals that day.

The dinner is always well-attended, with more than 80 people, and Boelig said it is an event they always look forward to.

"It is about taking care of your fellow man and making one day a little more comfortable for them," he said. "It will be a very robust meal. I have been at Isaiah close to three years now, and I do this because we love the atmosphere of helping people out."

At St. Vincent de Paul, volunteers have been hard at work preparing hundreds of baskets to be distributed Saturday and Monday in time for Thanksgiving.

Pantry Manager McKee Jack said there were 804 baskets distributed last year, and he thinks there is a good chance of hitting 900 this time around.

"We are ready for it," Jack said.

These will be groceries and not a prepared meal, including a turkey, canned and fresh vegetables, apples, stuffing, gravy and corn muffin mix. Volunteers Sue Gendron, Karen Fortin, Eric Phelps and Ernie Gault were putting together boxes on Friday afternoon, as they



Travis Cole, left, of RE/MAX Bayside, takes a turkey out of a pickup truck filled with frozen birds on Friday. His office delivered 127 turkeys to St. Vincent de Paul on Friday, in preparation for the food pantry's Thanksgiving distribution. Also pictured are Scott Knowles, back left; Dick Pease, back right; and Steve Emanuelli, front right. (Bob Martin/Laconia Daily Sun photo)

awaited turkey deliveries.

More than 600 turkeys were donated by Happy Cow Ice Cream Shop and its customers, and on Friday, deliveries continued, with turkeys coming in from Rist Frost Engineering and RE/MAX Bayside.

"Our office loves to give back, and this is one of the ways we do during the holidays," said Scott Knowles of RE/MAX Bayside, which donated 127 turkeys in the back of a pickup truck on Friday.

The distribution from St. Vincent de Paul takes place from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturday, Nov. 22, and again from 9 a.m. 1 p.m. on Monday, Nov. 24.

Meredith

Just a few miles away in Meredith will be the Mae Hart Dinner, which takes place at the Meredith Community Center, with food catered by Hart's Turkey Farm Restaurant for free.

Hart's Turkey Farm Owner Sim Willey said it is in his family's blood to give back to the community, going back to his great grandmother Mae Hart, who thought nobody should be alone on Thanksgiving. The tradition has been going since 1988

See next page

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from preceding page

in her memory.

"She always had her door open, and growing up, we always had a lot of people at our table," Willey said. "After she passed, we decided to open it up a little more."

Willey said the last thing he wants is for people to be hungry on Thanksgiving, and being in the hospitality business, he believes in helping his community. He said some of the volunteers at the dinner will be from Hart's, but most are just residents.

"Some have been doing this for years," he said. "I get them the food, and they do the next piece."

The food is prepared at Hart's, then trucked the few miles down the road to be served at the community center. There is also an option for delivery if someone couldn't leave their home for any reason.

"We will get them a hot dinner," Willey said.

This will be a traditional Thanksgiving dinner with turkey, mashed potatoes, stuffing, pie, a roll and a drink.

Meredith Parks & Rec Assistant Director Sarah Perkins said the meals are free to anyone in need from the towns of Meredith, Center Harbor and New Hampton. There was a registration, which has passed, but they won't ever turn anyone away. She predicts 70 people will be dining on Thursday, and another 80 meals will be delivered.

"It is a good social time," she said. "They may not know people when they arrive, but by the time they leave, they have new friends."

The meal will be served at noon, and deliveries will be sent out between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m.

Ashland

The Ashland Community Church is holding a free Thanksgiving Day feast, and all are welcome.

Pastor Ernie Madden said they want reservations by Sunday, so they know how many to cook for. There are 150 seats available, and it will also be a traditional spread with turkey. He expects there to be about 100 people, as 80 have already signed up.

"We have quite a few families who show up," Madden said. "The main goal is to not have anyone alone on Thanksgiving."

Reservations can be made by calling 603-968-9464, or texting 603-412-2112.

Tilton

The Northfield-Tilton Food Pantry will be distributing turkeys and laundry baskets full of food items on Tuesday, Nov. 25. While 40 people have already signed up, Assistant Director Star Murphy said there will be 60 more baskets to give out, first-come, first-served.

The distribution will be at the Northfield-Tilton Congregational Church, 283 Main St. in Tilton, 9-11 a.m. on Tuesday, Nov. 25.

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