



Perris Press Release

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Thanksgiving Comes Early for the Less Fortunate

Thanksgiving came early to about 200 men, women and children battling homelessness—thanks to Perris elected officials and others who strapped on aprons and ladled out heaping portions of turkey, dressing, mashed potatoes and gravy.

Representatives from the March Joint Powers Commission—including Perris Mayor Daryl Busch and City Councilman Mark Yarbrough—have for a decade served Thanksgiving dinner to less fortunate people living in shelters at the former March Air Force Base.

Those include U.S. Vets, for ex-military servicemen, Path of Life Ministries and Lutheran Social Services, shelters for single women and families. Honorary servers also included Perris resident and Riverside County Supervisor Marion Ashley; Kay Busch, wife of Mayor Busch; Riverside City Councilmen Andy Melendrez and Mike Gardner and Lori Stone, executive director of the March Joint Powers Authority, a sister agency of the March Joint Powers Commission.

Residents living in the three shelters comprise a mixed bag. Some face challenges of chronic homelessness and substance abuse issues. Others are single women confronted by domestic violence. Many are families who lost their homes and cars after their jobs ended. The jobs offered today are mostly part-time with no benefit and salaries too small to sustain a family.

"Things are really tough," said Cynthia Carr, a senior case manager at Lutheran Social Services. "Some of our clients have been looking for jobs for years."

Gloria Stripling, who works with clients at Path of Life Ministries, said she sees more first-time homeless parents and children, not folks who have battled chronic homelessness for years. California's economic woes make their lives perilous. "You're just one paycheck away from being homeless," Stripling said.

Richard and Annette Villa got into financial trouble three years ago when he lost his job as a warehouse employee. Eventually they and their three children "lost everything" and they were forced to move with relatives. After seven months living in transitional housing at Path of Life, they see their lot improving. Richard Villa got another job in warehousing. The couple said they were grateful to sit down to a Thanksgiving feast that included real china plates, cloth napkins, glasses and metal silverware.

They also appreciate being served by elected officials.

"We are enjoying our Thanksgiving as a family," Annette Villa said.

Those serving the food said that in the truest sense of the term, theirs was a labor of love. March JPA staff members solicited contributions to purchase the turkeys and trimmings and helped decorate the dining room at the Joint Reserve Training Center near March Air Reserve Base.

"It is important at this time of the year to think about the less fortunate," said Ashley, who worked the salad line. "This is a good, good thing."

Mayor Busch worked side-by-side with his wife. He dished out green beans, she ladled mashed potatoes. Busch called his work at the Thanksgiving dinner one of the most rewarding endeavors of his year. He's served dinner at the JPA-sponsored event for a decade.

"A lot of homeless people don't ever get the opportunity to enjoy a real holiday meal," he said. "A lot of us take Thanksgiving for granted but we should realize many families, including children, are really hurting. What we do here, by volunteering, is a little thing. But it makes me feel good."

Yarbrough said he uses the time to "pass on blessings." He drew a plum assignment for this year's Thanksgiving dinner—he dispensed the turkey.

"I am so glad that we are able to do this," he said. "When times are tough, you stop and count your blessings. I am glad that I am able to serve."



The Villa family, parents Richard and Annette, and children, Isabella, 14, Elias, 9, and Olivia, 10, await Thanksgiving dinner served by members of the March Joint Powers Commission and other elected officials. The family is being assisted by Path of Life Ministries.



Perris Mayor Daryl Busch ladles out green beans at the Sunday's Thanksgiving dinner. "Many families, including children, are really hurting," the Mayor says.



Perris City Councilman Mark Yarbrough hands out turkey to some of the 200 men, women and children who were served Thanksgiving dinner at the Joint Reserve Training Center.