

Open Pantry serves hundreds of meals on Christmas Day



Volunteers for the Open Pantry Community Services, Inc., including Rachael Jewell, right, feed hundreds of people Christmas dinner at the High School of Commerce in Springfield Massachusetts, December 25, 2014, including guest Neville Bonitto. (Michael S. Gordon / The Republican)

By [Elizabeth Roman | eroman@repub.com](mailto:eroman@repub.com)

December 25, 2014 at 3:47 PM, updated December 26, 2014 at 6:36 PM

SPRINGFIELD — Maria Ortiz didn't have any plans this Christmas. Estranged from her family Ortiz was going to spend a quiet day at home until she heard about the **Open Pantry** holiday meal served at the High School of Commerce.

"I heard about it at church and I figured I would come out," she said. "It's nice to spend the day with friends."

The Open Pantry served over 200 meals at the high school today as well as 400 or so meals to those who could not make it to the school.

"Typically it's elderly or disabled people who can't make it here for the holiday meal," said Jim Cuddy, executive director of the Open Pantry.

Cuddy said the organization serves meals every day of the year, but makes a special effort to bring some holiday cheer on Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter.

"The meals are handed out by volunteers. We would not be able to do it without them," he said.

Sydney Maxey and Kiley Sheehan are sixth graders in Agawam who came to help out. The girls served veggies and dip.

"It's the right thing to do to help out those who are less fortunate than us," said Sheehan, who heard about the dinner from Maxey.

"I come with my dad," Maxey said. "This is my second time."

Al Dasso and Bob Maurice have been volunteering for decades. Both men coordinate the holiday meals for the Open Pantry.

"A lot of people will call in and we send someone out to deliver the meal for them," Maurice said.

Dasso said there are about 30 volunteer drivers who hand out the meals.

While there are homeless people who come to the holiday meal there are also many families with children and elderly who attend.

Ramonita Gomez and Juan Luis Davila have been married for 50 years. He is a retired mechanic and she is a retired Head Start teacher. With most of their children grown up or passed away, the couple came out to the meal for some company and a holiday atmosphere.

"It's our first year coming here. We did not have any plans and this is a nice way to spend the holiday surrounded by people," she said.

U.S. Rep. Richard Neal also attended the event. The pantry holiday meals were held at the old Civic Center back when he was mayor of Springfield, he said.

"I'm just glad everyone can enjoy this day and we are so thankful to the Open Pantry and the volunteers who help out," he said.



Volunteers for the Open Pantry Community Services, Inc., including Shannon Ware of East Longmeadow delivering cups of milk, feed hundreds of people Christmas dinner at the High School of Commerce in Springfield Massachusetts, December 25, 2014. (Michael S. Gordon / The Republican)





Volunteers for the Open Pantry Community Services, Inc., including Amber Martinez with a tray of candy, Mya Diaz, 8, and Jeniah Diaz, 5, feed hundreds of people Christmas dinner at the High School of Commerce in Springfield Massachusetts, December 25, 2014. (Michael S. Gordon / The Republican)



Volunteers for the Open Pantry Community Services, Inc., including Wax Brackett, right, handing a plate of food to U. S. Rep. Richard E. Neal, D-Mass., feed hundreds of people Christmas dinner at the High School of Commerce in Springfield Massachusetts, December 25, 2014. (Michael S. Gordon / The Republican)



Volunteers for the Open Pantry Community Services, Inc., including Samuel Patterson, left, and Jose Santiago, dressed as two of the Three Kings, feed hundreds of people Christmas dinner at the High School of Commerce in Springfield Massachusetts, December 25, 2014. (Michael S. Gordon / The Republican)



Robert Maurice on hand as the Open Pantry Community Services, Inc. feed hundreds of people Christmas dinner at the High School of Commerce in Springfield Massachusetts, December 25, 2014. (Michael S. Gordon / The Republican)





U. S. Rep. Richard E. Neal, D-Mass., left, speaks before the start of the annual Open Pantry Community Services, Inc., Christmas dinner at the High School of Commerce in Springfield Massachusetts, December 25, 2014. At right is Open Pantry Executive Director Jim Cuddy. (Michael S. Gordon / The Republican)



Volunteers for the Open Pantry Community Services, Inc., including Jen Nyman, Ryan Silk and Tina Reno, feed hundreds of people Christmas dinner at the High School of Commerce in Springfield Massachusetts, December 25, 2014. (Michael S. Gordon)





Volunteers for the Open Pantry Community Services, Inc., including from left, Kiley Sheehan, Savitri Modi, Anazia McClain, Sydney Maxey, Amari Brown and Dorothy McDonald, feed hundreds of people Christmas dinner at the High School of Commerce in Springfield



Volunteers for the Open Pantry Community Services, Inc., including Nikai Fondon, Rolando Curtis and Ariana Curtis, feed hundreds of people Christmas dinner at the High School of Commerce in Springfield Massachusetts, December 25, 2014. (Michael S. Gordon)



Volunteers for the Open Pantry Community Services, Inc., including Diane Hajdamowicz of Agawam and Marci Marlow of Kentland, Indiana, feed hundreds of people Christmas dinner at the High School of Commerce in Springfield Massachusetts, December 25, 2014.



Volunteers for the Open Pantry Community Services, Inc., including Mitchell Martinez, 10, feed hundreds of people Christmas dinner at the High School of Commerce in Springfield Massachusetts, December 25, 2014. (Michael S. Gordon / The Republican)