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Food for You marks one year of free weekly meals

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A community meal program in Shelburne is marking a milestone after quietly serving hundreds of residents over the past year.

The Food for You program, hosted at Trinity United Church, recently celebrated its first anniversary after launching in early March 2025. The weekly initiative provides free hot meals every Wednesday evening, welcoming anyone who wants to attend, whether they need food, companionship or simply a night without cooking.

The program was originally started by a group of local volunteers, including Marci Lipman, Sandra Gallaugher, Shelley Doney, Ann McAlpine, Sabine Rohner-Tensee and Betty Harmony.

Lipman said the idea grew out of conversations during the COVID-19 pandemic about increasing food insecurity in the community and rising use of the Shelburne Food Bank.

?During COVID, I was stuck in my house up here in Shelburne, and I started walking with a couple other ladies, and some of them belong to this church,? she said. ?We talked about a lot of people attending the food bank in Shelburne, and that more and more and more people were having to use the food bank to feed them and their children.?

Statistics discussed through a public health food access committee suggested that roughly one in four households in Dufferin County experience food insecurity, prompting the group to find a way to help.

?We heard the statistics, which is that one in four households in Dufferin County is food insecure,? she said. ?One in four households, that's a lot of people, a quarter of the population. When we found out the church kitchen was getting certified, we said, ?Why don't we cook a meal once a week for anyone who wants to come?'?

The program operates on a simple principle: no cost and no questions asked. Guests can eat inside the church hall, take meals home or pick up food outside if they prefer.

Over its first year, volunteers estimate the program has served well over 1,000 meals, with weekly attendance typically ranging from about 16 to 30 people. While numbers fluctuate with the seasons, the organizers have worked to keep the program consistent, rarely missing a Wednesday.

Community support has played a major role in keeping the effort running.

Local businesses and organizations have donated food and sponsorships to help cover meal costs, including contributions from the Shelburne Golf and Country Club, Cobs Bread and other local sponsors.

Looking ahead, organizers hope to expand community involvement by encouraging more businesses to sponsor weekly meals and participate in serving.

?We are looking for local sponsors, local businesses, to help sponsor a meal, and we're asking for about a $200 donation to feed people for an evening, that kind of thing,? Lipman said. ?We're learning how to manage the food situation, but everyone should know about us, we're not a secret in the community? and so if we can include other people in the community, businesses and other people like that, then it's a full circle. It's a circular economy, as they say. We all can help each other.?

Seasonal events such as summer barbecues and holiday dinners are also planned as the program enters its second year.

For the volunteers behind it, the goal remains simple: offer a place where anyone in town can share a meal and feel welcome. As Food For You enters its second year, the objective remains unchanged ? to be a positive light in the community, serve good food, and share good times.