

*Toni's Kitchen provides food to our neighbors in need in ways that respect their dignity, improve health and foster independence.*

# Kitchen News

Toni's Kitchen ... More Than Soup

Winter, 2017

## In Our Own Backyard!

### *Local Solutions Prove Effective in Keeping Hunger Away*

At Toni's Kitchen, we are big believers in local solutions. And that is especially true when it comes to hunger. Children who need food in their cupboards are right here in our schools and on our playgrounds. Our own local crossing guards and bank tellers have slim paychecks that sometimes make healthy food out of reach. Many of our senior citizen neighbors never regained their sure footing after the recession. While the need is here in our backyard, so too is the know-how and willingness to step in and address the food needs in our midst.

What do these solutions look like? They are as diverse as those with food need. Earle picks up healthy salads for gatherings of senior citizens. Joe brings hot meals to young men being mentored through their teens. The YMCA makes sure kids go home with backpacks of healthy food when their families need an extra boost. And Beatrice and Carolyn make fresh, hearty soups to serve in our dining room. "We make soups with very low salt," Carolyn notes, "because quite a few of our guests are watching their sodium intake."

By knowing our neighbors, we can extend our hand in ways that are effective and help strengthen neighbors while respecting their dignity. We love being local!



*Alan Meyers picks up backpacks for a local tutoring program. Kids leave tutoring with backpacks of healthy staples and fresh produce every week.*

## We're Growing!!!



## Letter from our Director

This winter marks the 35<sup>th</sup> year that Toni's Kitchen will welcome hungry neighbors to a hot meal in the warm embrace of a community that cares. Guests arrive chilled and hungry and leave having had a healthy meal, time with friends, and the ability to connect with services. They leave with a lift in their step that speaks to the hope and support found during a shared meal.

As we enter the season of holiday gatherings, meals of abundance and resolutions for our year ahead, we at Toni's Kitchen are looking forward as well. We celebrate the many successes that 35 years have brought – neighbors nourished, homelessness prevented, families strengthened - and we look forward to the work ahead. We know that food insecurity is reaching into new, previously stable, populations. Bus drivers, retail workers and grocery clerks cannot always afford the high costs of living in Essex County. They work hard but these neighbors often experience periods when putting healthy food on the table just isn't possible.

So while we keep our ovens warm and our tables set for those who gather for a meal, we are also taking forward the lessons of 35 years of working

with our neighbors. We are finding ways to use food to strengthen the resilience of families, seniors, and the diverse populations of residents with food need.

We stand on the shoulders of a generation of donors and volunteers who have made this work possible.

-Anne Mernin

## Celebrating 35 Years...



Jim Axelrod, Senior National Correspondent for CBS News, gives keynote at Toni's Kitchen 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala. Jim emphasized, "The answers are always in our own backyard..."

## 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration – Oct. 21, 2017



## Art Workshops at Toni's

Stop by and work with our talented guests.  
Alternate Saturdays, 1:15-2:30



## Winter Happenings



Friday Nov. 24 – “Chopped Champion” and **Celebrity Chef Rachel Reuben** cooks



Saturday, Dec. 9 – **Making Merry**, an afternoon of crafts and cookie decorating



Monday, Dec. 25 – **Christmas Day Meal**



Monday, Jan. 15 – **Martin Luther King Jr. Day** of Service



Wednesday, Feb. 14 – Valentines Day **Neighbors Loving Neighbors** food drive

## Share Your Warmth!

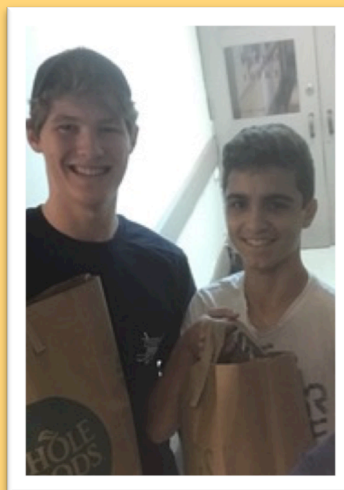


**We always need warm coats, boots, sweaters, gloves!**  
Drop off any morning 9-11:30 or during serving hours.  
All winter long!

## Taking the Initiative

With a desire to make an impact on hunger, MKA high schoolers Tristan Saidi and Alan DiGeronimo, started a Community Service Initiative (CSI) at

school. DiGeronimo recalls stories his grandfather would tell of how his mother would share what little food she had with fellow neighbors in need during the depression. “My involvement with Toni’s Kitchen through the creation of this CSI has made me feel as though I am reflecting my family’s roots and



traditions while at the same time bringing myself closer to the needs of my community.”

Students will volunteer at meals, pack healthy backpacks, bake, hold food drives and help in other creative initiatives. Saidi notes how quickly the CSI has become popular. “A lot of club members share a similar passion. They want to help those in need locally. Every week, our group grows.”

## Parties with a Purpose

Marisol Bermeo celebrated her 8<sup>th</sup> birthday with friends who brought snacks for Toni's Healthy Backpack Program. Daniel Gold has an "attitude of gratitude" that inspired him to ask his Bar Mitzvah guests for donations of healthy food for Toni's.

Birthdays, Bat Mitzvahs, neighborhood parties, and holiday gatherings all mean more when they also help feed our neighbors. "The feeling you get when you round up your friends and do something to help far outlasts the joy of receiving," says Marisol's mom, Susan Bermeo.

Neighborhood gatherings can raise needed food as well as awareness. "We loved the opportunity to drop something off for Toni's Kitchen right on our block," says Dawn of her neighborhood Oktoberfest.

Thank you to all our visitors who thought about our guests when celebrating with special guests of their own!!!

*Regular weekly or monthly donations are critical to our operation. The predictability of incoming food or financial donations allows us to expand our reach, knowing that we can meet the growing need. To find out more, visit our website at [www.toniskitchen.org](http://www.toniskitchen.org).*

### **Toni's Kitchen**

*A food ministry of St. Lukes Church*

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