

Dianne Wood, Record staff Mon Nov 19 2012 07:05:00 0 Comments 1 Recommend

## Local Soup Sisters' cooking evenings reach new groups

WATERLOO REGION — A local group that makes soup for needy people never thought they'd attract book clubs and people celebrating their anniversaries.

The Soup Sisters have met monthly for the past year to make soup for homeless youths and pregnant women living in Marillac Place, a Kitchener shelter.

Their monthly get-togethers have proved so popular, the public have been booking spots into March.

Sandi McCrory, one of three women who started the local chapter of the national group, thinks that's because the gatherings are social events where women learn cooking tips and recipes while doing something good by making soup for the community.

Women sign up ahead of time to attend a soup-making session at The Culinary Studio, a Belmont Avenue cooking studio and dining space.

When they arrive, they enjoy a glass of wine and appetizers over a mix-and-mingle.

Either Kirstie Herbstreit or Jody O'Malley, both trained chefs, give a lesson on chopping and cutting. The women make 75 litres of five different soups each month.

Representatives from ROOF (Reaching Our Outdoor Friends), a centre for homeless youth and youths at risk, or Marillac Place talk briefly about their agencies. The Soup Sisters have been making soup for these two agencies for the past year.

The women end the evening by sitting down to a bowl of soup, more wine, some bread and salad.

The \$50 fee they pay gives them a nice night out with good food and professional training, McCrory said.

"People are itching to sign up."

The Soup Sisters have had book clubs take over a cooking evening. The owner of a Pilates studio gave a cooking night out to his staff as a gift.

And a couple celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary with The Soup Sisters. Their friends were kept in the dark — they were just told where to show up.

The cooking evenings, which include Soup Sisters co-founders Janet Uffelman and Norma Weiner, can take 20 people.

The group is about to start delivering hot soup to another local agency — the Anselma House women's shelter. They will officially be welcomed to the fold Nov. 20 at "The Big Stir," when the Soup Sisters join other chapters across Canada by making soup on the same night.

Merle Fast, Anselma House's residential program manager, is thrilled to be added to the Soup Sister's delivery list.

"We operate on a very limited budget, food-wise," she said. "This will make a huge difference in the quality of the food we can provide to the women."

The shelter will get 70 litres of soup every two months. There are currently 43 mothers and children staying at the shelter.

Fast, who's in charge of food and nutrition, said the soup is "very hearty — it's like a meal in a bowl, chockful of vegetables, lentils, carrots, onions."

The soup program also gives Anselma House a chance to talk to women who come to the cooking nights about domestic violence and the shelter's services.

The new *Soup Sisters Cookbook* by Sharon Hapton, who founded the Calgary-based non-profit group in 2009, is now available.

The cookbook, which is No. 2 on the Globe and Mail Bestseller List, can be purchased for \$23 from Chapters, Household China and Gifts in Waterloo, Words Worth Books in Waterloo, the Culinary Studio, and Amazon. It can be ordered from [waterloo@soupsisters.org](mailto:waterloo@soupsisters.org).

One of the spinoffs from the monthly cooking sessions has been the people who come up to make soup and end up volunteering for either Roof or Marillac Place, McCrory said.

Some are making baby quilts and sweaters for the babies, plus providing child care as respite for the women at Marillac Place.

Another woman who works in the music therapy program at WLU got students in the program to provide music therapy at Roof and Marillac Place.

To sign up for a cooking session, contact [kitchenerwaterloo@soupsisters.org](mailto:kitchenerwaterloo@soupsisters.org).

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Sandi McCrory (left) of Soup Sisters and Merle Fast of Anselma House with that day's soup.

Philip Walker/Record staff

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