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**Table Hosts - General Information**

**History**

From the first Community Thanksgiving Feast in 2005, our goal was to provide a welcoming dining experience to everyone. It didn’t matter why our guests were attending, or where they came from. Our vision was to create a “Community” event. While it’s a given that many of the homeless in our area would find their way to the Thanksgiving Feast, we also emphasized an invitation to many others…seniors, families, nearby military, college students, those who work nearby and anyone that would otherwise spend Thanksgiving alone.

In other words, we would invite ALL to the table for food and fellowship.

Along with this inclusive desire, the concept of “Table Hosts” began to form. Through our vision, no plates of food would be handed to guests....people wouldn’t wonder where to sit….and most important, they would have someone to talk with – even for a short time.

This has become our signature volunteer role on Thanksgiving Day; allowing singles, couples, families and groups to be of service to others. It’s often used as a “stepping stone”, where children can experience volunteering alongside their parents and see how they can grow into other roles.

**Questions and Answers**

Because we often turn potential volunteers away, we ask that those interested in serving as Table Hosts, spend time in reading through this Q&A. Learning about the expectations will help you to decide whether this is a good fit for you, your family or friends. Too often we have well-intentioned volunteers sign up, only to leave early or go home disappointed. It is hoped that this will answer many of your questions prior to our volunteer signup date.

*Special Note: I cannot stress enough the need to be responsive to inquiries from The Giving Heart. Please ensure that your email will accept notes from vneilson@thegivingheart.org.*

***What is a Table Host?***

Table Hosts are the center of our Giving Heart Community Thanksgiving Feast. In this role, volunteers sit and eat with those who are brought to their assigned table. Think of this as your own personal dining table in the middle of 240 – yes, 240 – tables!

***Who can be a Table Host?***

Anyone!!! Friends, family members, clubs and singles are welcome. This is a wonderful way to introduce children to helping others as they see firsthand that even the simplest act of talking and sharing a meal is so welcomed. While children are certainly welcomed in this role, those under 18 years of age must be accompanied by at least one adult.

***How do I register my family, group, etc.?***

When our application process begins, **only ONE person** will need to fill out our application form. On the form, simply indicate the number of adults and children. Names of all adults will need to be noted when registering. ***New this year: there are 3 distinct forms to choose from: Table Host, Single Table Host and Single Host with Children.***

***Can I host a table by myself?***

If you are single, we’ll add you to one of our “single party tables”. This brings together 2 or more single persons who would enjoy hosting with others. Each table seats up to 10 people…so you can understand why we encourage more than one person for hosting duties. *Single volunteers who wish to bring last minute friends should understand that they will be considered guests that you brought with you if we are unable to relocate you to your own separate table so late in the signup process. For this reason, we highly recommend that you plan your signup accordingly.*

***What if I am a single parent with children?***

No problem! You and your children may be able to host a table together. On our application form, it asks the age of children. If your children are under the age of 13, we may place you with another single parent with children. Our tables are large and it’s nice to have adults on at least two ends to help with the table conversations. *As with our single volunteer assignments, those wishing to bring last minute friends should understand that they will be considered guests that you brought with you if we are unable to relocate you to your own separate table so late in the signup process. For this reason, we highly recommend that you plan your signup accordingly.*

***How many can sit at a table?***

Each table holds a maximum of 10 people, not counting infants. Every effort is made to spread our guests among the tables to allow everyone the opportunity to dine with guests. **Our current expectation is to sit a minimum of 4 guests on each table. We are simply unable to predict the number of guests, so your understanding on this regard is appreciated.**

***What about infants and small children?***

High chairs and booster chairs are not available at the event, but you may bring your own. Note: If you will be bringing a booster chair, please count the child in your table number count when reconfirming the number in your party when you arrive at the convention center. This will allow us to adequately place guests at your table.

***What if I have a large group?***

We all know the term “the early bird catches the worm” and experience has shown that waiting for friends/family to decide if they want to volunteer can often cause you to miss the chance for a low table number – thus putting you in a position of possibly long waits or no guests to sit with. For that reason, we often recommend that you simply encourage others to go to our website and fill out their own application forms. If this isn’t your desire, and you absolutely need to sit near each other, please fill out the application form indicating the names of all adults and the number of children. **There is a limit – per application – of 16 people, including children!!!**

***How early should I apply to host a table?***

ASAP!!! While there are 240 tables, our dining room is laid out in 4 sections. As guests are seated in the room, the lower the table numbers (#1, #61, #121 and #181 respectively) the better your chances of having guests at your table. *Single table hosts and single-parent table hosting will usually learn their specific table number close to the event day to allow us to adjust any changes to such tables.*

***Where do I park, check in – and at what time?***

Free parking is available at the Greater Richmond Convention Center parking deck, located at 3rd and Marshall Streets. ONLY this deck is free – others around the area may charge. The Giving Heart is not responsible for any fees associated with parking. **If you have your Table Number confirmation (sent Thanksgiving week), please proceed directly to your assigned table. If you don’t have this with you, our check-in assistants will be happy to help direct you to the proper table(s). PLEASE DO NOT ARRIVE before 9:30 am to allow key volunteers to assume their duties in anticipation of your own arrival!!! You must be at your table by 10:30 to allow us to reconfirm head counts prior to opening our doors. Failure to arrive by 10:30 may result in your table being offered to those on our waitlist.**

***Why do I need to arrive so early if there is a long wait for guests to be seated?***

Our original event was held across the street, in the banquet area. This allowed only 100 tables to be seated at a time. This was great for volunteers who could come and go at specific arrival times, but hard for our guests who often stood for over 3 hours. When we relocated to the larger area, we made the decision to do the opposite…we would be the ones to sit and wait. At best, we were warm and would have somewhere to sit. If waiting for guests is not of interest, we ask that you reconsider the table hosting role or sign up early enough to be assured of a timely waiting period.

***What if I don’t wish to eat, can I still Table Host?***

One of the focal points at our Community Thanksgiving Feast is the “food and fellowship” at the table. No one wants to feel like someone is watching over them, so we kindly request that volunteers in this position participate in the actual dining experience. If you aren’t planning to eat, please consider other volunteer positions.

***Will there be enough guests to fill all the available seats?***

Our guests come from all walks of life and unfortunately we cannot predict the attendance. We make every effort to spread the word to those who would particularly benefit from this event. Signing up early will help to ensure you have guests at the table. Another option is to consider bringing guests of your own! Perhaps you might know a neighbor, someone from church or even work who might enjoy being with someone on Thanksgiving. Bringing your own guests will not only guarantee a full table, but will also allow you to sit down and eat in a timely manner.

Please understand that **we actually seat guests until 2:30 pm.** Last year many people left and arriving guests ended up sitting alone.

***I heard we need to decorate our table. Can you tell me about that?***

Decorating your assigned table is NOT required! It is, however, a question that we ask on the volunteer application – not as a requirement, but to let us know if there’s a need for centerpieces that are sometimes donated by others. ***The Giving Heart provides a white tablecloth, placemats (if you don’t have your own) and paper products.*** Many Table Hosts like to create a nice centerpiece to make their tables more inviting. (Again, think of this as your own personal dining table). This can be as simple as a basket of fruit or some small item for guests to take home. ***Giving Bags, toiletries and other large items should be sent to the Distribution Room to help us evenly distribute such items.*** Keep your offerings to small items, snacks, etc. **Note: Balloons and candles (lit or unlit) are NOT permitted as decorations!**

**NOTE: If you indicate that you will decorate your table, PLEASE DO NOT take centerpiece decorations that are present in the dining room. These are made by wonderful volunteers to assist table hosts who were unable to decorate their own tables. Any extras as of 10:45 am will become available and announced!**

***New this year…..***

***Guest will need to have a wristband to enter the Distribution Area. As part of your Table Host duties, you will pick these wristbands up from our placemat/centerpiece area AFTER your guests have dined. Wristbands will be given to singles, couples and families to allow us to distribute items accordingly.***