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# Community Kitchen to provide 1 million meals for Baltimore area families in need



July 1, 1:46 PM Baltimore City Buzz Examiner Holly Woerner

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Maryland Food Bank mission statement Holly Woerner

On Tuesday, the Maryland Food Bank opened its new Community Kitchen in Halethorpe. The 6,000 sq. foot space will use donated food from hotels, caterers, and retailers to prepare and freeze an estimated one million + fully cooked meals for local families each year.

The program funded in part by Baltimore County and Baltimore City, is designed to meet the needs of Baltimore area food pantries, soup kitchens and feeding programs. Community Kitchen is revolutionizing the way residents can give

and receive at a time when taxes are up, unemployment rates high and just about everyone is feeling the pinch on the purse....or ahem! Their *European shoulder bag*.

Fifteen volunteers per shift can prepare and package portions ranging from a serving for four up to 5 gallons for soup kitchens. Once cooked, the meals can be flash frozen in 30 minutes.



"This community kitchen embodies the spirit of community coming together, an innovation to service delivery," said Greg Sileo, Director of Community Services for Baltimore City's Community Action Program. "City meal programs and food pantries depend on the food provided by the Maryland Food Bank," Sileo continued.

Requests for food assistance is at an all time high with families from all walks of life struggling to



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stretch every penny. "The fastest growing group of people being served are people who work full time," says Baltimore County Executive Jim Smith.



In this kind of economy, one can imagine that while many residents may wish to help in some way, cash is too tight for donations. Community Kitchen allows volunteers an alternative to monetary donations by giving their time which in theory will provide a greater benefit to a higher number of people in your own community than say \$20. Imagine what it would cost to feed the number of people who will eat the meals volunteers prepare in a few hours?

Volunteers have been a vital part of getting the Community Kitchen project off the ground from its inception. Corporate partners and private companies pitched in funding, materials and manpower to get the new food prep facility up and running.



"Gill-Simpson provided the electric install, but it was our men who donated their time, their weekends, and time away from their families to provide the labor," E. Christopher Odell President of Gill-Simpson, Inc. told the crowd at the grand opening.

Community Kitchen is taking Maryland Food Bank's goal of eliminating hunger in a radical new direction. Besides preparing over one million pre-packaged meals, the kitchen's state-of-the-art equipment will also be used as a culinary school to provide job training for 25 lucky students. Each 12 week course includes a two week internship.



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In addition to job placement assistance, the program "will help students support their family with this skill to make an impact from the ground up," says Smith. Maryland Food Bank's goal is to end hunger, so teaching students how to provide for their family is simply another way to provide the most basic need: the need for food.

Upon completion students get a "[ServeSafe](#)" certification, a supply of chef's uniforms, plus their own knife set and chef's hand tools. For someone looking to start a new career in the Culinary Arts, or just a fresh start, this program will provide students everything they need to work in the food service industry.



Chief Operations Officer, John May says he has his own specific goal regarding graduates of the Community Kitchen training program, "I want to go to downtown Baltimore and eat food from one of our students who became a chef."

Executive Chef Aida Blanco, formerly employed by Walt Disney Resorts in Orlando, is no stranger to high production. She'll oversee Community Kitchen's training program and the cooking itself.

The first class will begin on August 2, 2010. Students will learn

- Cooking Techniques & Methods
- Product ID
- Equipment and Small Wares Proper Usage
- Starch, Protein, and Vegetable Cookery
- Knife Skills

- Effective Communication
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To apply to become a student contact [Brenda S. Campbell](#), Culinary Student Coordinator at (410) 737-8282 ext. 249.

## Community Kitchen



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