

Volunteers Make Thanksgiving Special for Poor

By Craig McGuire

Take one generous helping of dedication, combine the donations of a concerned community, and stir in hundreds of hours of community service, simmer and serve hot. What you

have is the recipe that brought Thanksgiving into the homes of hundreds of needy Brooklynites this year.

Mike King, chief organizer of the food drive sponsored by the St. Tho-

mas Aquinas Out-Reach Program, anticipated that over 800 people would benefit from the program this Thanksgiving.

King said that the meal this year, which included turkey for each recipient,

took volunteers five days to prepare.

The program operates year-round, but King said, "We try to do something special for Thanksgiving and Christmas." Based in Monsignor King Hall located on the corner of Flatlands Avenue and Hendrickson Street, the program is open Tuesday through Friday.

Ed Navarra, vice president of the program, said the demand often dictates the supply. "During the winter, when the weather turns cold, we open more days than in the summer," he related.

An operation that annually assists thousands of New Yorkers had its humble beginnings in the King household years ago when King, assisted by his mother, distributed homemade sandwiches to the homeless.

By 1985, King decided he had to expand the effort

and approached the pastor of St. Thomas Aquinas, who agreed to sponsor the program.

The volunteers receive the food through organized drives, larger donations from local merchants, and even the Brooklyn College cafeteria.

Community members, parishioners from various churches, and students from area schools donate their time. "Several of the children are required to do some sort of community service for school and confirmation, so many of them chose to do it with us," said Navarra.

Thirteen-year-old volunteer Kathleen Brandow called Out-Reach a special organization because "not only does it help the homeless, but it allows the children of the parish to come together for a good cause."

According to Navarra, word of mouth has done much to benefit the program. "Now they know

where we are and what we're doing, so we get by."

King added that the group is also available to pick up donations.

At times the response is so great that the program gets more food than it can handle.

"We take the food on the road and give it to shelters and soup kitchens and some of the local people we are aware of," said Navarra.

While the program has met success in the community, it receives little support from government. "We are in the process of trying to get assistance, and it looks good," said Navarra, who added that he expects an official response soon.

In addition, King said the volunteers plan to organize their first fundraising event, to be held next year. Specifics for the event will be announced at a later date.

For information on the program, call St. Thomas Aquinas at 253-2832.



Volunteers and organizers take time out to pose before gearing up for Thanksgiving rush.

