

'Generous' Ottawans aid in Easter spread

Donations vital to Mission's biggest meal of year



TRACEY TONG/METRO OTTAWA

Held yesterday, the Ottawa Mission's Easter dinner wouldn't be possible without its donors and volunteers, said the shelter's executive director Diane Morrison. The dinner required more than 100 volunteers including, from left, Matthieu Farkas, Anne Hersey and Kelly Rigole.

TRACEY TONG
METRO OTTAWA

April 06, 2010 5:12 a.m.

The Alliance to End Homelessness gave Ottawa near-failing grades for its approach to dealing with the homeless last week.

But that doesn't mean that Ottawa residents don't care about the homeless.

The Ottawa Mission held its Easter dinner yesterday, serving 2,485 meals to the city's less fortunate. The meal is the shelter's biggest of the year.

"Usually at Christmas there are all kinds of things going on, and the same thing at Thanksgiving," said executive director Diane Morrison. "This is a special kind of meal for people who just need to be with community today."

Many of the items served yesterday, like the 350 pies, were donated, and the rest of the meal, which included 2,300 pounds of prime rib beef and 3,000 baked potatoes, were purchased with donations.

"People are quite generous in this community," said Morrison.

"It's absolutely vital that we have community donations," she said. "Only 40 per cent of our funding is covered by any kind of government support, so 60 per cent of our operating budget has to come from the community. That's all of our programs and these special meals that have to be supported by our community."

The dinner, which took a full week to prepare, wouldn't be possible without volunteers, said Chef Ric Watson.

"It's important to us that we give back," said volunteer and Ottawa Police Superintendent Mike Flanagan. "It is great that they are able to come to a place like this."

"Everyone does what they can," said regular volunteer Tina Mattila. "I think we can always do more, but I think Ottawa definitely does care. We see it everyday."

"Ottawa's good," said Morrison. "People do care about the homeless. They're somebody's son or brother, or their father, and I often get those letters that say, 'my dad stayed with you,' or 'my brother is there right now.' There has to be an emergency place where people can come when there is just no place for them to go."