

PRESS RELEASE

June 21, 2012

ESSEX COUNTY FREEHOLDERS HONOR TONI'S KITCHEN ON ITS 30TH ANNIVERSARY



Freeholder Brendan Gill (right) of Montclair presented a Commendation from the Board to Reverend John Mennell, Rector of St. Luke's Episcopal Church, honoring Toni's Kitchen on its 30th Anniversary. (PHOTO BY GLEN FRIESON)

(Newark, NJ) – During its Wednesday, June 20th, meeting held at Montclair Town Hall, the Essex County Board of Chosen Freeholders honored Toni's Kitchen, a soup kitchen located at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Montclair, on its 30th Anniversary of service to needy residents in Montclair and surrounding communities. The Commendation was sponsored and presented to Reverend John Mennell, Rector at St. Luke's, by District 5 Freeholder Brendan Gill, who also resides in Montclair.

“Toni's Kitchen epitomizes what is best about this county, and particularly this community of Montclair”, said Gill, “in the sense that we always try to reach out to those who are less fortunate than us.”

Accepting the Commendation, Reverend Mennell remarked that, “The sad truth of our reality is how close each of us is to becoming a guest at Toni’s Kitchen.” He went on to say, “It is the amazing generosity of Essex County residents in Montclair and beyond that keeps Toni’s Kitchen running week in and week out, and I want to thank everyone who supports us in this incredibly important and worthwhile mission.”

Toni’s Kitchen celebrated its 30th Anniversary with an event entitled, “Celebrating 30 Years: A Benefit for Toni’s Kitchen... More Than Soup”, held at the Women’s Club of Upper Montclair on Saturday, March 3, 2012. An outreach ministry of St. Luke’s, it was founded in 1982 as a Lenten project by a group of women who decided to help those in the community who faced a daily struggle to survive by providing food for those in need. It began as a soup kitchen and was named after its first cook, Antoinette (Toni) Green, who was the cook for the South End Day Care Center that was housed at St. Luke’s.

Toni’s Kitchen began to grow from its initial dozen clients as it received provisions from the Community Food Bank of New Jersey in Hillside, assistance from students and faculty from Montclair Kimberley Academy, and contributions from the community at-large, growing from a cadre of 20 volunteers to more than 300 over the course of the next three decades; it has kept up with the recent and growing need for assistance in Montclair and surrounding communities, which has seen the number of meals provided increase from 5,660 in 2005 to approximately 9,500 in 2011.

Toni’s Kitchen, which currently operates with a volunteer crew of between 15 and 17 people each day, has expanded its offerings beyond the provision of healthy meals to include various other support for the needs of its guests, including: toiletries distributions, a music program, a computer access and skills training program, resume assistance, yoga/meditation, health and wellness programs, and Toni’s Living Room, a community space for people to go when public buildings are closed. It continues to strive to fulfill its original mission, “to provide guests with quality food to nourish their bodies and a peaceful atmosphere to nourish their souls”, while also helping its guests to connect more effectively with services and basic necessities through its close partnership with the following outstanding organizations: Second Time Around Shop, The Montclair Foundation, United Way of Northern New Jersey Pantry Partners, the Mental Health Association of Essex County, HOMECorp, BlueWaveNJ Public Interest Foundation, the Montclair Health Department, Mountainside Hospital, St. Michael’s Medical Center and the Montclair High School Civics and Government Institute; and

Toni’s Kitchen Advisory Committee is comprised of: Reverend John Mennell, Director of Outreach Anne Mernin, Kitchen Manager Laura Feire, Karen Kadus, Diana Lunin, Patricia Moulton, Marybeth Nibley, Jed Posnick, Mike Reitman, Renee Reso, Jim Snodgrass, John Wyatt and Michael Mernin, Montclair High School Civics and Government Institute Liaison.

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