

THE WELCOMING OPEN TABLE

Increase in demand seen for community food supper program.

By [Lisa Loomis](#) | [ConcordPatch](#) | November 22, 2010



Credit [Lisa Loomis](#)

Every Monday and Thursday afternoon, the activity picks up at The Open Table, a weekly community food supper program, in both Concord and Maynard. Donated food shipments are sorted from local markets, cooks volunteers arrive to cook and preparations are made to make the guests feel welcome. By the time hungry guests arrive, they will find an open table overfilled with food.

Founded in 1989, Open Table serves up to 200 guests per week in Concord. The food is fresh and a nutritionist helps to plan the meals. Chicken Divan was the main course this past week.

"There is no sharp line between who is a guest and who is a volunteer," notes Peter Hilton, President of Open Table.

Every Thursday night from 4 - 7 p.m. at The [First Parish in Concord](#), a loyal group of 50 volunteers offers their time and energy helping to feed 120 people with up to 50 additional patrons taking meals to go. Some guests receive their meals on wheels.

There has been a 50 percent increase in services needed.

With over 200 volunteers offering their time every month for 2-3 hours, the tasks are spread among a large group who "care about social responsibility," Hilton notes.

"People in Concord really care about Open Table and feel it's important. We're really supported," Hilton said.

Many retail stores contribute and help to make this happen. Starting at age 15, local students contribute their efforts with setting and cleaning up. Local food drives are held each month.

Judy Terry, a Concord volunteer of Open Table, notes that, "there's nothing that makes a difference like this. I am amazed at the generosity in gifts of food."

Susan Evans, operations manager for the Open Table at the Clock Tower in Maynard, has seen a significant increase in the number of guest families coming.

"They never thought they'd have to come to feed their families. This year has seen a big increase in guests. Unemployment has run out." Evans noted.

70-100 guests show up every Monday night in Maynard.

Evans and many of the volunteers at The Open Table Program are devoted. Giving a sense of community and social interaction to "so many people in the same situation. It can happen to anyone. We're like family. We're all friends," Evans said.

Many high school students are required to give community service and benefit from their association with Open Table.

Evans' daughter, a local high school student, is not even keeping track now of how many hours she helps out.

"I've found my place," Evans said.

Many other Open Table volunteers share the same sense of dedication.

Harriet Kaufman, past president of Open Table, and now Coordinator of Guest Services, connects guests to resources and agencies that will help them.

Kaufman recognizes, "the spirit of people who manage incredibly difficult lives and they're very appreciative. It's this sense of community. A little support goes a long way. This is the place where respect, belief and hope can be found."

For more information, please see the website, <http://opentable.org/>