

More than 1,000 enjoy meals at St. Anthony's

Michael Shapiro

PENINSULA TIMES TRIBUNE

In a festive and bustling Christmas celebration, more than 1,000 people came to St. Anthony's Padua Dining Room in Menlo Park to share a holiday meal Friday.

Outside the dining hall, hundreds of excited children waited in long lines for free toys distributed by Menlo Park firefighters. They came away with Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, toy trucks and Barbie dolls.

Elva Gervacio of Redwood City brought her five children to the festivities at St. Anthony's and said they were "muy contento" (very happy) with the toys.

This year's celebration at St. Anthony's was the best ever, she said, because there were many more toys than last year.

Manuel, her 7-year-old son, received the truck he'd asked Santa for. He showed off his huge, new 18-wheeler, and said the truck was almost too big.

David Marshall of East Palo Alto, who regularly eats hot lunches offered by St. Anthony's, said he was grateful for the meals provided.

"I've been out of a job for eight years," he said. "I usually come here four to six days a week."

Wearing a black "Georgetown Hoyas" cap, Marshall said he walks "every step of the way" from East Palo Alto to the Menlo Park dining hall.

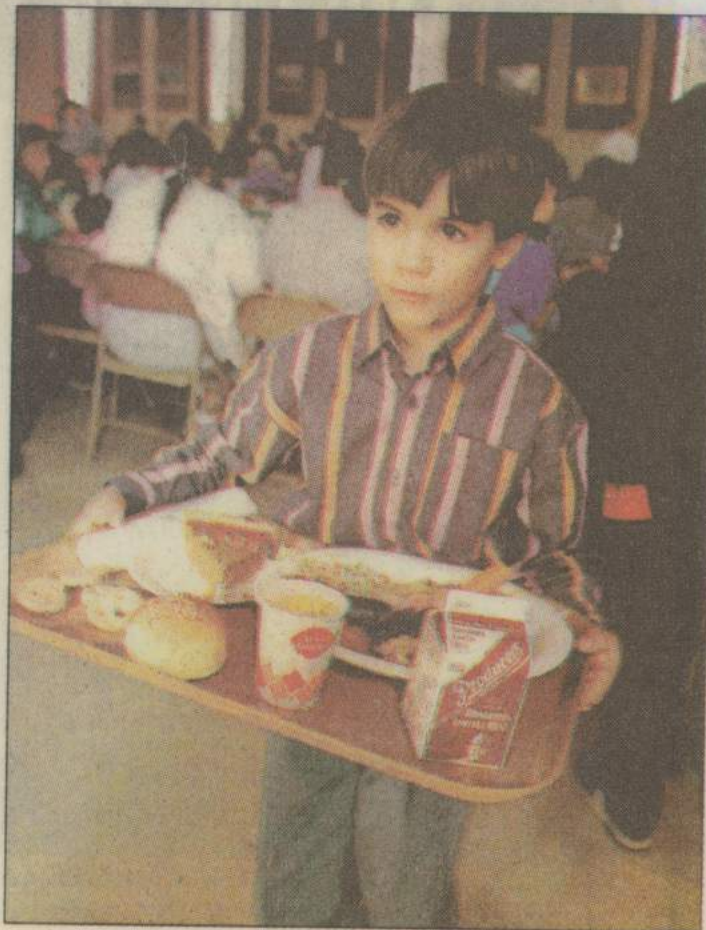
"I'm happy that there's a place where a person can come and get food to eat and get full," he said.

He looked around and noticed that many people left a lot of food on their plates to be thrown away.

"I would never leave that much food on my plate," he said. "I'm full and I got this food left on my plate, but you know what? It's not going in the garbage can."

Marshall then pulled an extra plate and plastic bag from inside his jacket.

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JOE MELENA / PENINSULA TIMES TRIBUNE

It's time for a warm Christmas dinner as Manuel Morfen, 8, of Redwood City takes a tray of food toward his table Friday at St. Anthony's Padua Dining Room in Menlo Park. Outside, Menlo Park firefighters distributed free toys.

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TIMES TRIBUNE 900-NUMBER 'INSTANT UPDATES'