

VOLUNTEERS

Dining room volunteer gave up work, not life

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Milka Holloway worked as a nurse for more than three decades until a medical condition forced her to take an early retirement.

Yet she continues to serve countless people every week as a volunteer at St. Anthony's Padua Dining Room in Menlo Park.

"They tell you to retire from work — they don't tell you to retire from life," she said during a brief break from managing the kitchen at the dining hall on Christmas Day.

Meeting people from all walks of life is one of the main reasons that Holloway continues to coordinate meals every Thursday and Saturday. She also volunteers for the American Cancer Society and works two days a week as a clerk in a Menlo Park used book store.

"With all three of these jobs you get to know a lot of different people," she said. "It's very rewarding to work here."

Holloway manages to deftly blend organization and compassion in her service at St. Anthony's.

"When I'm here on Thursdays and Saturdays," she said, "I run the kitchen with an iron hand, but you have to treat them, (those who come for free meals), with respect and dignity. That's so important. "They're nice people — even



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Her hands full with a baby carriage, a Padua Dining Room patron gets help with her tray from volunteer Milka Holloway (right) on Christmas Day. Holloway says meeting people from all walks of life is one of the main reasons she continues to coordinate meals there every Thursday and Saturday.

MILKA HOLLOWAY

Hometown: Menlo Park.

Age: "Less than 100."

Occupation: Retired nurse from the Kaiser Hospital, now working in a used book store.

Family: Divorced with two adult daughters.

Organizations: American Cancer Society volunteer.

Reason for volunteering:

"I'm paying back God. ... Sometimes when you feel down and out, you should come to a place like this. It's very rewarding."

the roughest."

Holloway said part of her reason for service is her religious faith.

"I'm paying back God," she said. "I get a certain satisfaction from this, so I'm doing it for me, too."

Looking around the dining room on Christmas Day, (along with Thanksgiving one of the two busiest days of the year), Holloway said that not everyone who comes for the holiday meal is destitute.

"Maybe they're lonely or young people who live by themselves," she said.

More families than ever have come to St. Anthony's during the past couple of years, as the economic downturn has made it difficult for working parents to feed their families.