

# Loaves and Fishes

*By KC Piccard-Krone*

Loaves and Fishes Centers was established in Portland by a group of people who organized in 1969 to find ways to meet the nutritional and social needs of neglected area seniors. The paramount goal of the founders of this grassroots nonprofit organization was the eradication of senior hunger and malnutrition by "providing a hot nutritious meal to every senior who has asked for one." Their program was based on the proposal by the National Council on Aging, which has developed into the national program Meals-on-Wheels.

The first Portland center opened for business in February 1970 in the dining hall of the Lincoln Street United Methodist Church. On the first day, fifteen seniors were greeted at the door by volunteers, with food and fellowship on the menu. The Meals-on-Wheels program was launched on the same day, with fourteen deliveries to homebound seniors as part of an ongoing effort to "enrich the lives of the seniors and help them maintain their independence by making social contacts and other needed resources easily accessible."

Over the next four decades, Loaves and Fishes expanded several times to meet the needs of the community, extending their outreach from the Portland Metro tri-county area to offer senior nutrition programs in Vancouver, Washington, including seniors in the most rural and underserved areas of Washington and Clark counties.

Loaves and Fishes Centers grew over the years from a single meal-preparation and meal-delivery site in a church to its first central kitchen, which opened in 1975 at 42nd and Sandy Boulevard. Swiftly outgrowing that space, the agency moved in 1979 into a refurbished Safeway building with a commercial kitchen on Southeast 52nd and Woodstock. In 2003, the organization opened a 28,000-square-foot Central Kitchen and Resource Center in Multnomah Village in southwest Portland.

With the annual help of over 7,500 volunteers, in 2009 Loaves and Fishes served over 5,000 hot meals each weekday to seniors at 35 congregate centers in Multnomah, Washington, and Clark counties.

Loaves and Fishes Centers receives the majority of its support from dozens of charitable foundations, including the Collins foundation, and about 40 percent from Federal funds. In 2009, the organization served more than 1.4 million meals to seniors in the Portland-Vancouver metro areas.

In addition to expanding its outreach into Clark County, the creative donation and community partnership programs of Loaves and Fishes Centers have attracted the attention of similar senior nutrition programs across the country.

## Sources

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Administration on Aging (AoA), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *A Profile of Older Americans: 2009*. Washington, D.C.

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