

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE | September 9, 2021

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20 YEARS OF ART + FOOD: A Celebration to Feed Thousands Across WNC

MANNA FoodBank Announces the 20th Annual Empty Bowls Event

(Asheville, NC)—When art, food, music, and friends all come together again this fall to celebrate the 20th annual Empty Bowls event, it will be a true celebration. For 20 years now, a community of caring people have come together year after year to make Empty Bowls an incredible event that has filled millions of plates. These are the people who have lovingly crafted every bowl, perfected every drop of soup, and happily stepped forward with their presence and a beautiful variety of support.

The members of the Empty Bowls family of potters, chefs, sponsors, volunteers, and organizers are gearing up to ensure that the 20th celebration will again reach out with hands of love to the tens of thousands of families across the mountains who are struggling even now to afford the groceries they need.

In what has been an unprecedented time in MANNA FoodBank’s history since the start of the pandemic in March 2020, food bank staff emphasize that the support for Western North Carolina families still struggling to make ends meet is more vital than ever.

“The pandemic deeply impacted thousands of families in WNC who were already struggling to make ends meet because of the extreme cost-of-living and income gap that has been reality for many years in the mountains,” says Mary Nesbitt, Chief Development Officer for MANNA. “We continue to serve over 30% more people—especially working families with children, and seniors living on a fixed income—with emergency food support across the region, even now. Empty Bowls is more than just a fundraiser – it is a very impactful way for our

community to come together to help get much needed food to those who need it most.”

Every handcrafted bowl from the incredible professional arts and crafts community that has helped put our region on the radar, and every bite of the delicious cuisine from the nationally acclaimed local culinary community is donated to the cause, ensuring that each attendee truly makes an impact for the community: Every regular ticket sold will help provide 160 meals to working families, seniors, and families with kids who look to MANNA and our partners for support every day.

“Paul, Tisha and I along with other Odyssey potters are happy to donate to Empty Bowls,” says Brian McCarthy, owner of Highwater Clays, local potter, and longstanding Empty Bowls supporter. “MANNA does so much in WNC to help alleviate hunger in our own and neighboring communities that we are happy to use our skills, imaginations, materials, and time to help in this effort.”



The Bowls Family

One of the best parts of attending Empty Bowls is the change to choose a beautiful piece that speaks to you. Over the years, local artists have donated an astounding 15,890 handmade, gorgeous bowls that are as much works of art as

they are beautiful, practical pieces in a home's dish collection. The bowls come from well-known and favorite local potters, featuring interesting and thoughtful shapes, a gorgeous range of glazes, and unique special touches.

"Every bowl that is made must be touched many times as they are guided through the forming, trimming, bisque firing, glazing, glaze firing, touching up and boxing," says McCarthy. "It is something that we have a passion for and to know that this ancient craft is being utilized today to help reduce food insecurity is very gratifying."

"As an avocational potter who since 2009 has made hundreds of soup bowls and Collectors' Corner pieces for the MANNA Empty Bowls events, I am continually impressed with the spirit of generosity that spreads across the many levels of this event," says Dr. Barbara Gerber, local potter and longtime Empty Bowls supporter. "The generosity of merchants who contribute clay, potters who gladly donate time and expense making bowls, the hotel every year generously providing the venue, restaurants and chefs happily donating meals, people elsewhere inspired by this and starting their own EB events, and supporters purchasing and enjoying a beautiful bowl and excellent meal ... all to support MANNA so they can feed those in need. At each point in this, generosity breeds generosity."



The infographic features a dark green background. In the top left, there is a logo of two hands holding a bowl, with the text "Empty Bowls By the Numbers" in orange and white. In the top right, there is the Manna Foodbank logo, which includes a stylized orange hand holding a bowl and the text "MANNA FOODBANK". In the center, there is a large white number "15,890" with the text "HANDMADE BOWLS DONATED" in orange below it. To the left of the number, there is a graphic of three yellow bowls stacked on top of each other.

Empty Bowls
By the Numbers

MANNA
FOODBANK

15,890
HANDMADE BOWLS DONATED

The Food Family

It wouldn't be a joyful reunion without food, and fortunately, food takes the center stage at MANNA's Empty Bowl event. The smells of delicious soups, breads, and desserts fill the ballroom, and attendees have the chance to taste offerings from many of our region's most celebrated chefs and restaurants. The enthusiastic support from the culinary community stands out with secret recipes, long-time family favorites, and of course, creative new offerings that become instant classics with event attendees.

The best part is that while these compassionate culinary partners are helping feed attendees, they are also helping to feed the thousands of households MANNA serves every day.

"MANNA has been the mainstay agency in Western North Carolina that is in the business of helping those in our midst suffering from food insecurity. We at Corner Kitchen and Chestnut have always taken great pleasure in assisting MANNA in this most basic and important endeavor. Actively helping at the Empty Bowls event is just one of the ways in which we can give back to our community. We are proud that we can continue to be a small part of all that Manna Food Bank does for those in need." - Chef Joe Scully of Chestnut and Corner Kitchen.



The graphic features a dark green background. In the top left, there is a logo of two hands holding a bowl. To its right, the text "Empty Bowls" is written in large orange letters, with "By the Numbers" in smaller white letters below it. In the top right, the Manna Food Bank logo is displayed, consisting of a stylized orange hand holding a bowl and the text "MANNA FOODBANK". The central focus is the large yellow number "35,000" with "BOWLS OF SOUP SERVED" written in white below it. To the right of the number is a simple illustration of a bowl of soup with steam rising from it and a spoon inside.

Empty Bowls
By the Numbers

MANNA
FOODBANK

35,000
BOWLS OF SOUP SERVED

The Local Business Family

It takes supporters of many kinds to keep up the years of excellence and tradition that sets Empty Bowls apart as a “must-do” fall event. Behind the scenes are dedicated sponsors, in-kind supporters, and other members of the local business community who step forward in a major way to lend a hand in filling as many empty bowls as possible with each event.



Empty Bowls
By the Numbers

MANNA
FOODBANK

Meals Provided to Date:
2.77 Million

It takes many people coming together and using their gifts and talents to make a real impact in our community for the thousands of families needing emergency food support. To the potters, chefs, our beloved volunteers, sponsors, and to every single attendee who comes to Empty Bowls: from the depth of our hearts, THANK YOU for making this an event that makes a true difference, filling the tables of so many families over the years, with food and hope.

“Odyssey and Highwater Clays has been supporting Empty Bowls since the first event MANNA held decades ago,” McCarthy says, “and we intend to continue until our hands wear out.”

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MANNA FoodBank is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization serving Western North Carolina since 1983. As an accredited member of Feeding America, the nation's largest domestic hunger relief organization, the mission of MANNA FoodBank is to involve, educate, and unite people in the work of ending hunger in Western North Carolina. MANNA serves over 250 community-based non-profit food assistance partner agencies in 16 Western North Carolina counties and distributed 21.5 million pounds of food in 2019/2020. MANNA is a nonpartisan organization committed to sharing facts and information about issues related to hunger in Western North Carolina and how they affect those we serve. For more information, visit MANNAFoodbank.org, or call 828-299-FOOD.

About Feeding America

Feeding America® is the largest hunger-relief organization in the United States. Through a network of 200 food banks and 60,000 food pantries and meal programs, we provide meals to more than 40 million people each year. Feeding America also supports programs that prevent food waste and improve food security among the people we serve; educates the public about the problem of hunger; and advocates for legislation that protects people from going hungry.