

Community Kitchen History

Community Kitchen of Monroe County, Inc. (CK) was incorporated as a nonprofit organization on June 21, 1983. The first meals were served in March of 1983 on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays at Monroe County United Ministries (formerly known as the Christian Center). Women from several Bloomington churches were the catalysts behind the organization of CK. Their actions were in response to their concerns for local people who needed help in getting enough to eat. In keeping with their religious convictions, these women established a policy of asking no questions or outlining eligibility requirements for those needing food. This is a policy that stands to this day.

From its first days until August 1992, Community Kitchen served meals at the Monroe County United Ministries building. In addition, a second feeding site was opened at McDoel Baptist Church in 1989. From August 1992 to November 1992, CK was in transition as it awaited renovations on a building at 917 South Rogers Street, a building owned by Perry Township. During this interim period, CK found a home at First United Methodist Church. Church members and regular CK volunteers came together to operate meal service during this transition. Thanksgiving 1992 marked the resumption of full CK operations as the first hot meal was served at 917 S. Rogers on that holiday.

CK has grown from a small organization with one part-time employee serving meals three days a week to one with full- and part-time employees and volunteers serving meals six days a week. A 15-member board representing a wide variety of segments of the community oversees the operations of CK.

CK has grown not only in organization and governance, but also in the numbers of services it offers. This growth in part is a reflection of an agreement with Perry Township for CK to expand its services, and in part a fulfillment of CK's mission statement. In 1993, CK began serving six meals a week at 917 S. Rogers and providing free carry-out meals upon request. In addition to meals, a "free bench" offering various foodstuffs operated for a few years. In 2001, a branch of CK called "CK Express" opened in an old fast food restaurant on West Eleventh Street to expand services throughout the community.

The continuing relationship between Community Kitchen and Perry Township reached a new level in late 1999 and 2000. Perry Township purchased a former strip shopping area on South Walnut where it relocated its offices. The township board offered Community Kitchen, Shelter, Inc., and Mother Hubbard's Cupboard spaces in the complex. CK space is used for storage of records and food. There is also enough room for committee meetings and limited office space.

CK has been very proactive in addressing the needs of at-risk children in our community by various programs. In January, 1994, CK collaborated with the Boys and Girls Clubs to provide free dinners two days a week at their sites at Crestmont and Henderson Courts. This program expanded to serve at-risk children in other areas of the city.

Research shows that breakfast is the most important meal of the day and that children receiving breakfasts in schools perform much better. In order to fill the gap between school years, CK started a summer breakfast program in June, 1997. Brown-bag breakfasts of nutritious foods are distributed, ice-cream truck style, in various low-income housing areas.

In addition to meals, CK offers other services to its patrons. A part-time social worker is available for consultation as are representatives from various social service agencies who visit on a periodic basis to provide services. Volunteers from the Waldron Arts Center provide opportunities for the children eating at the Kitchen to express themselves through art. Another project that started at CK was the Community Garden Project. This project had a goal of helping people learn to grow their own food and perhaps market it to customers in the city. This project was eventually transferred to the city for implementation in the Crestmont area.

CK responds to both the long- and short-term needs of its patrons. Some folks need assistance for years while others need it only during emergencies or at certain times of the month. Whatever the need, patrons find CK a place where they not only eat, but linger for conversations with other patrons, volunteers, and staff members. This social support is often as important, or perhaps more important, than the meals. Building on this sense of community, CK provides very special meals on Thanksgiving and

Christmas. This tradition dates back to 1990 when the first Christmas meal was served. On these holidays, CK also provides holiday meals for delivery to elderly and home-bound individuals.

Since CK's inception, the number of meals served has steadily increased. This increase is due to increased need and to expansion of serving sites. CK is able to provide wholesome, nutritious meals at a very low cost because a large part of the work is done by volunteers and food is either donated or purchased at very low prices.

Funding for CK's services comes from a variety of sources. In 1990, CK became affiliated with the United Way of Monroe County, Inc. Community Kitchen directors have been very active in the United Way Agency Directors Association, which is a part of United Way. Other income sources range from grants from private/public sources and churches to special fundraising events. Two fundraisers that generate substantial income are the "Taste of Bloomington"—staged by Bloomington restaurants, and the "Palette to Palate" art auction. The latter event, initiated by a board member who is also a member of the local artistic community, was first held in 1999.

CK's founders established several basic principles that still provide the basis for its operation. Some of the more important ones are:

1. Anyone in need of a meal during CK's serving hours is welcome to eat. No attempt is ever made to determine that a need exists, and the agency provides meals with no attempt to pass judgment upon those who come for food.
2. The privacy of all patrons is carefully protected. Those who eat are asked to sign in so that a count of individuals served can be calculated, but only first names are required. The agency considers independence from outside control and influence over our policies important and cannot accept aid from agencies that require divulging the names of our patrons. Photographers from news media have occasionally asked to take pictures of CK's operations. The agency strictly enforces a policy that prohibits the photographing of patrons.
3. Most CK operations are conducted by volunteers who serve as representatives of various church, civic, and educational groups. Several other volunteers work on individual bases. Community Kitchen feels it is desirable to involve the broadest possible base of individuals and groups in its operations. Without volunteer opportunities, people would not see—firsthand—the nature of the need for assistance that exists in Bloomington or have an opportunity to provide personal help to individuals-in-need. Frequently, volunteers are restitution workers assigned to work with the agency by county officials. Many times these individuals continue to help after their required service has been completed.
4. Community Kitchen considers it essential that meals served be balanced and nutritious as well as attractive and tasty. There is particular concern that adequate proteins be included in each meal. A vegetarian choice is always available. Staff work very hard to include a variety of vegetables and fruits and milk is always available as a beverage. Food at the Community Kitchen is varied and never boring!
5. Community Kitchen seeks financial support from a wide variety of sources. However, as we consider independence from outside control and influence over our policies important, we occasionally must pass over some funding opportunities.
6. Community Kitchen strives to minimize the cost of food and supplies through low-cost supplier. The majority of food is purchased from Hoosier Hills Food Bank at a nominal price per pound. These regular purchases are supplemented by donated foods from various businesses, churches, and individuals.

Community Kitchen is truly a community effort. Due to the strong support it receives through donations of time, money, equipment, and food from many groups and individuals, it has been able to provide an important addition to the social services offered to individuals-in-need in our community.

TIMELINE – of Community Kitchen History

March 1983	First meals served at Monroe County United Ministries.
June 21, 1983	Community Kitchen incorporated as nonprofit organization.
1990	CK becomes affiliated with United Way. 3,000 meals served each month.
1991	One full-time employee and two part-time employees.
August 1992	Move to First United Methodist Church
November 1992	First hot meal served at S. Rogers on Thanksgiving.
1993	Community Kitchen opens six days a week.
January 1994	“Feed Our Future” program with Boys & Girls Club initiated.
April 1996	Tom King resigns as Director after eight years of service.
August 1996	Robin Jackson hired as new Director. Five paid staff members and a \$100,000 budget. Carryout meals started Over 5,000 meals served each month. Garden project started.
April 1997	First benefit breakfast at Meadowood.
June 1997	Summer breakfast program started.
1999	First “Palette to Palate” art auction held in Fountain Square Ballroom.
December 1999	Consideration of South Walnut site begins.
March 2000	Robin Jackson resigns as Director.
May 2000	Julio Alonso begins work as Executive Director
July 2001	“CK Express” opens.
August 2001	First benefit Breakfast at Bell Trace.
July 2002	First fund-raiser collaboration with BPP – Acting Against Hunger
2002	CK serves a record 128,218 meals.
2003	Community Kitchen’s 20 th anniversary.
December 2003	Julio Alonso resigns as Executive Director
March 2004	Vicki Pierce begins work as Executive Director
Summer 2004	CK provided snacks for IU’s National Youth Sports Program
Summer 2005	CK expanded Summer Breakfast Program to include Arlington Park Apartments, Arlington Valley Trailer Park and Crestmont Boys & Girls Club
June 28, 2005	CK provided a record number of prepared meals in one day - 857

July 2005	Rhino's Youth Center begins participating in Feed Our Future Program
August 2005	Began Backpack Buddies Program – Backpacks of food sent home on Friday afternoons with children at Fairview Elementary School.
2005	CK once again served a record number of meals for the year – 132,018.
August 2006	Expanded Backpack Buddies to include Summit Elementary School
September 2006	Began Nutrition Links in partnership with BHHS Positive Link – 2 carryout meals are delivered by volunteers to the homes of HIV+ clients of Positive Link, free of charge.
Spring 2007	CK is awarded a \$29,800 grant from the City Council Social Services Funding to add a new walk-in-cooler & freezer, doubling the size of cooler and freezer space available at the Kitchen.
August 2007	Backpack Buddies expanded to include Arlington Elementary School.
August 2007	CK holds a new fundraiser, Bloomington's Chefs' Challenge – an on stage cooking competition featuring three local chefs. The first year the event raised approximately \$7,000 and Jake Brenchley of Scholar's Inn was the winner.
2007	CK shatters the previous record of meals served in a year by 16% & serves 152,516 meals.
August 2008	Proceeds from the 2 nd annual Chefs' Challenge event raises over \$10,000 and Alan Simmerman of Bloomingfoods West was the winner.
January 2009	Backpack Buddies expanded to include Grandview Elementary School.