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Serving Compassion

Tuesday, June 30, 2009

Pizza for the Hungry feeds bodies and spirits

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For people who have a house or apartment, ordering a pizza for dinner may feel rather ordinary. But for those experiencing homelessness, the simple pleasure of calling for takeout represents a life they no longer have.

That's why the nonprofit eyeBLINK, which runs *Pizza for the Hungry: A Smile Brings Hope*, bought 138 pizzas for the guests of St. Francis House on June 20. Obaid Kadwani, eyeBLINK'S business manager and the project's creator, wanted to make guests feel special and "create hopeful smiles," he says, by transforming our dining room into a neighborhood pizza parlor.



Weekend staffer Wayne Payne unloads some of the 138 pizzas our guests enjoyed on June 20.

His sister, Qurrat Ann, eyeBLINK'S artistic director, donned an apron and helped serve 322 guests, each of whom received three slices of Domino's pizza. "Thank you," said one person after another. Many added, "Pepperoni! That's my favorite."



Obaid Kadwani (left), creator of *Pizza for the Hungry: A Smile Brings Hope*, enjoys a slice with one of our guests.



Obaid's sister, Qurrat Ann Kadwani (at far right), helps serve more than 300 hungry people.

What most guests didn't realize, until Obaid and Qurrat Ann (see pictures at left) were introduced to the crowd, was how many people had pitched in to make *Pizza for the Hungry: A Smile Brings Hope* a reality. Supporters from across the country donated money to buy the pizza. The corporate office of Domino's gave eyeBLINK a discounted price, and the Domino's on Staniford Street threw in various toppings free of charge. Tonika and Gary Bohnert had served as local project managers, and the Kadwanis, who live in New York City, had driven up to join the party, one of four held simultaneously at Boston homeless shelters.

"We strongly believe in feeding the mind, body, and spirit," says Obaid, who grew up with the strong belief that "to be happy you must help others." He views the parties as a win-win for everyone involved, because they allow donors "to see a direct, palpable difference. When

\$1 buys two slices, that's a direct cause and effect, and that reinforces what everybody is told that small steps count, every drop counts."

People have been so supportive of *Pizza for the Hungry* that the project has grown from one state in 2007 to 25 states this year. In 2010, Obaid hopes to expand even more.

Those facts didn't impress guests nearly as much as the pizza itself, which allowed people to forget their cares and enjoy a favorite comfort food, just like thousands of other Bostonians. Each bite represented freedom or better days that will hopefully come again soon.

"These parties are about people healing each other," says Obaid. "We hope that by creating hopeful smiles, maybe a guest finds that little bit of extra strength to fight harder against circumstances."

One guest expressed his gratitude by saying, "I liked the pizza a lot, and in a sense it reminded me of more simple times in my life and perhaps, as a consequence, my childhood."



Guests enjoy the pizza, a rare treat.

Thank you, *Pizza for the Hungry*, for making such good memories and a great lunch possible.