



Wayside Soup Kitchen (1986) Founders

by Bill Rayne

I am following up on our full-page article in the January [2016] issue of *Insight* about the founding and early years of Wayside, now called Wayside Food Programs. One of the founders—building contractor Tom Vacca—served for many years as Executive Director. At the founding, Tom and his wife were on the administrative board and were focused on “logistics”—which largely meant getting food to Portland from the Good Shepherd Food Bank in Lewiston. As I recall, “lug” was a word he humorously used in his description of it.

Among the many founders, there are two women who I want to mention. One, Jean Holt, was a choir director for Immanuel Baptist Church and directed children and youth in choirs called The Joyful Noise. Her husband John Holt was our pastor and also a Wayside board member, along with a number of other pastors from area churches. Jean agreed to be the Wayside Soup Kitchen’s president for the first year.

“She was the driving force,” Tom remembers, and “knew how to run a meeting, and get things done.” Jean and John Holt were also familiar to the many Immanuel volunteers on the nights when we served the evening meal from our own downstairs kitchen and Fellowship Hall.

The third founder I wish to acknowledge did much of the legwork of bringing a diverse group of church and community leaders together for Wayside's first organizational meeting. A Wayside Soup Kitchen flyer credits Karen Evans with “realizing the need for an evening soup kitchen,” and meeting with a core group from some of the area churches. Other churches were invited to participate and “eleven area churches committed to serving three meals a week. On April 14, 1986, they served the first meal at Immanuel Baptist Church.”

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