

Soul food

DePaul center fills bellies, hearts of Louisville's hungry, lonely

By JOSEPH GERTH
Staff Writer

Louisville's hungry, homeless and lonely were treated to top-notch Thanksgiving cuisine at the St. Vincent dePaul Center yesterday.

The center served about 350 free turkey-and-dressing dinners, executive director Paul Willenbrink said.

"They treat you fine here," said Albert Lanham, who lives nearby. He doesn't have any family, but was happy to spend his holiday with his friends at the center.

And, because he eats there almost every day, he was sure the food would be more than passable.

Plenty of other people thought so too. More than a half-hour before dinnertime a line formed outside the center, which is in the basement of St. Paul Catholic Church on Jackson Street.

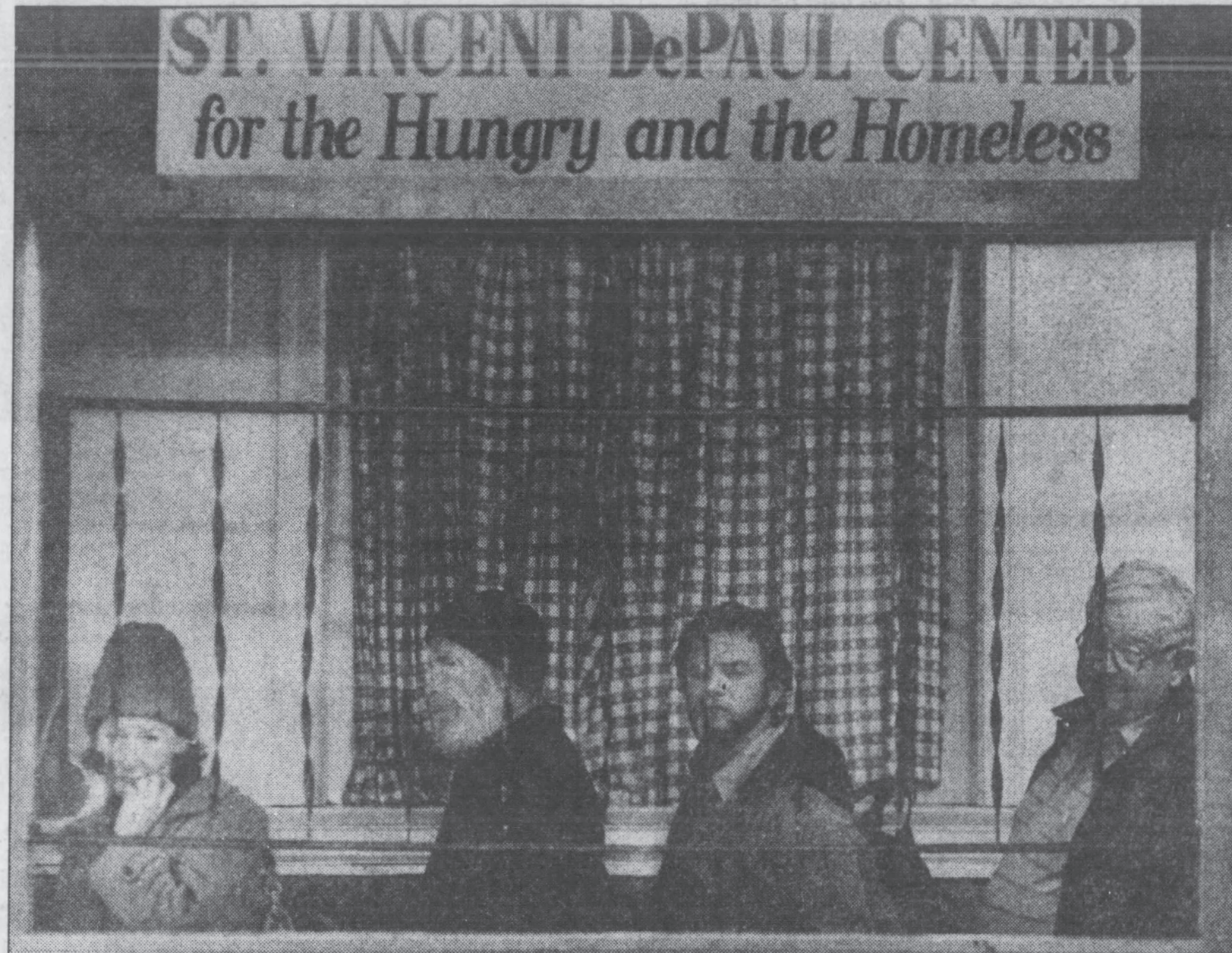
But there was really no need to reserve a spot in line because, thanks to Kentucky Harvest and Casa Grisanti Restaurant, there was plenty of food to go around.

Kentucky Harvest helped provide Thanksgiving dinners for the center and eight other missions in the area, said the group's chairwoman, Pam Catlett. She estimated Kentucky Harvest fed 3,500 people yesterday.

Casa Grisanti donated and prepared the food served at the dePaul center, while other restaurants and hospitals provided food at other sites.

In addition, several local politicians — Louisville Mayor Jerry Abramson, Jefferson County Judge-Executive Harvey Sloane and Judge-Executive-elect Dave Armstrong — dished out turkey, dressing, sweet potatoes and other items on the menu.

The dePaul center was prepared for a crowd of more than 700 but served only about half that many. Willenbrink said the



STAFF PHOTO BY PAT McDONOGH

People waited in line for Thanksgiving dinner at the St. Vincent dePaul Center on Jackson Street in Louisville yesterday. The center provided about 350 free turkey dinners to Louisville's hungry, homeless and lonely.

leftovers will not go to waste, however.

"We'll serve turkey tomorrow and the day after . . . until we run out," he said.

Although the center has fed as many as 500 on past Thanksgivings, Willenbrink said the lower turnout does not mean there are fewer hungry people in the area.

"It could just be that more centers are serving turkey dinners," he said. "It used to be that we were the only one serving turkey — now all the centers do."

And although fewer people ate at the center this year, Willenbrink said they came for the same reasons they always do.

Some are out of work. Others have jobs but don't earn enough to afford a traditional

Thanksgiving dinner. Still others have no family in the area and didn't want to spend the holiday alone.

Naomi Riley, who lives in the Newburg area, said none of her relatives could come to Louisville to visit her this Thanksgiving, so she drove to the center not just for the meal, but also for the company.

"I didn't feel like cooking. . . . It's easier for me to come in here to eat," she said.

Joe Hester walks to the center frequently from his apartment in Dosker Manor on Muhammad Ali Boulevard. "I come down quite a bit. I'm single and I don't have anyone to cook for me. It's good food and it's good exercise for me," he said.

Jerry Noe and his mother, Victoria Noe, said they go to the center only on holidays.

"But this place comes in handy," Jerry Noe said. "I'm out of work right now, trying to find a job, and my mother is on food stamps and SSI. The SSI is barely enough to pay the rent."

Jim Ohligschlager, director of the St. Vincent dePaul Society, said he feels good knowing his group is helping people who might not have anything to eat on Thanksgiving.

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**—Jim Ohligschlager,
former St. Vincent
de Paul Louisville
Director**