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## Tavern in the Square restaurants to provide free Thanksgiving dinners to some 850 people

Posted by Matt Rocheleau November 14, 2012 02:01 PM

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By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

When an estimated 850 people in need eat a free Thanksgiving dinner across three Tavern in the Square restaurant locations next Thursday, they will be served by a total of about 180 volunteers, many of whom will prepare tables, food, drinks or cleanup.

But others will be on hand to provide a different kind of sustenance: friendly conversation.

Mark Morris, one of the local restaurant chain's co-owners, calls those volunteers the "Good Samaritans."

"They go and sit with anyone who's by themselves to talk to them. It takes a little while, but people start opening up," he said.

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He said being in the company of others is a vital part of the tradition of Thanksgiving, along with the mashed potatoes and gravy, stuffing, cranberry sauce, slices of turkey and other dishes that will be served at three of his restaurants.

“It’s something they’re looking forward to and it helps them get through the day,” Morris said.

He started the free Thanksgiving dinner in 2005 at the Tavern in the Square in Central Square in Cambridge. That location has been the busiest, drawing more than 400 people each year. The tradition has expanded to the chain’s Allston and Salem restaurants.

Growing up in South Boston, Morris said a church in his neighborhood would hold a large Thanksgiving dinner each year for those less fortunate. Those dinners have always drawn large crowds. He promised himself he’d offer something similar if he ever owned his own restaurant.

“It’s been great,” Morris said. “We get a lot of elderly people, homeless, families in need, people who don’t have anyone to spend the holiday with.”

“I like that fact that it’s become a tradition. I like seeing the people in the neighborhoods,” he said. “When the fall starts coming, they all talk about how they can’t wait for Thanksgiving.”

Morris said many of the volunteers return to help out year after year. They look forward to the date as much as those who drop in to eat, he said.

The doors at each location – in Central Square, Salem and Allston – open at 11 a.m. Food is served until 1:30 p.m., though eating hours will be extended “if there’s still people coming through the door,” Morris said.

No registration is required. “It’s open to anybody,” and it’s free he said.

Along with the meal, there will be pies, coffee, juice, water and other drinks, he said. No alcoholic beverages are served.

For more information, including to ask about volunteering, contact the Tavern in the Square locations: Central Square in Cambridge at 730 Massachusetts Ave., 617-868-8800 or [centralinfo@taverninthesquare.com](mailto:centralinfo@taverninthesquare.com); Allston at 161



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