

# Blind chefs prepare Thanksgiving feast in Reseda

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*Miresha Flowers, left, keeps an eye on David LaPoint as he pours pumpkin pie mix into a pie shell. Clients from the Therapeutic Living Centers for the Blind gathered at a group home in Reseda on Wednesday, Nov. 21, 2012 to put together all the fixings for a Thanksgiving feast. (John McCoy/Staff Photographer)*

RESEDA - The pumpkin pie, turkey stuffing and mashed potatoes were going to be as good as mom's.

The only difference? The turkey and fixings for Thursday's Thanksgiving table were deftly prepared by the developmentally disabled blind.

"It's going to taste good. Delicious. Just like my mother's," said David LaPoint, 53, of Reseda, beating a pumpkin pie filling as an assistant added gobs of brown sugar. "It means we're giving thanks to the Lord."

LaPoint was among a dozen chefs from three group homes run by Therapeutic Living Centers for the Blind who assembled Wednesday evening in Reseda as a sunset turned a bright pink and blue.

In the kitchen were workings of a Thanksgiving feast, prepared for residents at a dozen TLC homes across the San Fernando Valley.

"It's an opportunity for each resident to get together to prepare for the holidays," said Cyndi McAuley, executive director of the social service agency based in Reseda. "It comes out really well. We've got some amazing cooks here."

For 37 years, TLC has been a pillar of support for residents and their families who need housing, education and lifetime care for the developmentally disabled blind.

In addition to providing services for 200 adults and children at its 2-acre Reseda complex in specially designed classrooms, an aquatic center and garden, it also hosts a dozen group homes for adults, as well as an intervention program to help kids live with blindness at home.

It's now building a children's center, where blind disabled kids can go to school.

For many residents, Thanksgiving is the high point of the year.

"It's my favorite," said Amanda Sandoval, 25, tamping the lumps out a pot of steaming, freshly cooked spuds.

"Mine, too," said Jill Goff, 60, a TLC client, who'd finished a day's work at a New Horizons social service center packing nuts and bolts. "But I don't like gravy. Just plain turkey. And plain mashed potatoes. It's about giving thanks for what I have - a job, a nice house, my friends."



*Michael Zahn, left, and Lorena Mallory mash up some potatoes. Clients from the Therapeutic Living Centers for the Blind gathered at a group home in Reseda on Wednesday, Nov. 21, 2012 to put together all the fixings for a Thanksgiving feast. (John McCoy/Staff Photographer)*

The potato masher would be passed to such residents as Michael Zahn, 53, Lorena Mallory, 58, Stephanie Greenberg and 29-year-old Matthew Wilson, a classical pianist.

By turn, there would be no lumps.

"I'll do the onions," said Greenberg, who is blind. "I'll take the skin off. And I use a knife. But I won't cry. I can't cry 'cause I like Thanksgiving. I'm thankful about being here."

After LaPoint stirred his pumpkin to perfection, Zahn, who is visually impaired, poured it into a pre-baked crust.

"I'm pretty sure it'll come out," said Zahn, beaming. "I'm pretty sure it's gonna be hot."

"Thanksgiving would be bad without pie."

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