

"Over the years, the number of people attending the dinner grew. It grew so rapidly. In 1993, we had 175 but the most we had was the year after when we had about 180 people over," he recalled.

The Quinte Community Christmas Dinner, he continued, was for anybody in the area and was not directly attached to any particular church.

"It was designed to run as a community organization without church related attachment because we found that if you make it 'churchy' you lose a lot of people. One person who was invited to come and have dinner at the church said 'I don't go to church why would I go there and have dinner.' So, we sent them out a dinner."

Beginning in the second year, the organizing committee began to receive funding for the dinner from St. Thomas Church and the Belleville community.

Burton remembered getting on the radio in September each to announce the annual dinner.

"I used to go on the radio starting in September advertising about it and asking for donations. Truly, I used to get worried that come December food wouldn't be coming along and I'd be in a real panic. When it start coming in, it used to simply bowl me over

with the amount of stuff we used to get. One year, a local school called me up to say that one of their classes had a bake sale. They collected enough money to buy all the vegetables for us. I tell you that just thrilled me to pieces," he said.

The committee received donations both in cash and kind.

"One fellow called me up one year and asked me if I would like some apple cider and he offered me 15 gallons of it. I accepted it gratefully. The problem was I didn't have place to store and refrigerate it and we lost about 10 gallons of it. It went sour. But those are the things you have to contend it," he said ruefully.

People arrived from communities such as Napanee, Trenton, Stirling, Wellington and Picton, he said. Some were families with children, others were singles and couples whose children were elsewhere and could not be together for Christmas.

"A city couple, living in a highrise, called to say that they would like to join us for dinner at the church. The husband said he wanted to pay for it and I told him that it was all donated and they didn't have to pay. He said, 'I want to pay for it. My family's not here. They're out west. My wife and family usually go out to

restaurants but it's cold there. There's nobody there. It's just not friendly.' They came for the dinner and also gave us a sizeable donation. We were able to buy gifts for everyone, nothing expensive and hand them out to people going out the door," said Burton.

The dinner was usually held in one seating at noon on Christmas Day and always consisted of turkey, mashed potatoes, squash and vegetables followed by sumptuous dessert of cakes, puddings and pies.

Little get wasted each year, he said. Leftovers were sent to local group homes while the diners took some home. Burton was not always that lucky.

"One year we ran out of food. I happened to have cottage rolls. We cooked that up and sliced them and we did everything we could just to get through. After that, I made sure I had apples every year so that I didn't run out of food," he said.

Along with the delicious dinner, entertainment was often provided by local artists such as singer Andy Forgie and clowns Ding and Dong.

"One year, we had this local professional singer come and sing for us. She and her husband came up with their two children and put up a good show for us. I was

talking to them afterwards and I asked them 'Just out of curiosity, what kind of a cost would a program like that run it and she said I usually charge \$5,000.'

For many years, Bruce Nickle and his wife, Marjorie Nickle, came as Mr. and Mrs. Santa Claus and delighted folks at the dinner.

"Another time we had an elderly gentleman three years up from north of Hamilton area. He used to come and do paper origami. He would take pieces of paper and fold them up into birds. He would get them singing songs. He was one of those people who could work a crowd into having a party."

Now that he is no longer actively involved with the Christmas dinner tradition, Burton confided that he missed sitting and talking with people and getting to know them.

Burton is still a member of the board for Christmas Sharing and although the dinner tradition is a separate entity, it is co-ordinated today through Christmas Sharing Committee. Burton is also on the board for Links for Learning Resource Centre in Belleville.

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