

# *Dinner on Broadway: A Legacy of Love, Food & Community*

“She just understood how special it is for people to gather and fellowship around food.” That’s how Bruce Hageman remembers his late wife, Susan. “She saw how good food -- served in a loving, nonjudgmental, non-threatening environment -- made everyone relax and savor the moment.”

A little over two years ago, Bruce and his daughters were grieving, planning Susan’s funeral, and trying to imagine a fitting memorial. That conversation grew into a project that has inspired extraordinary generosity and created a living legacy for the entire community surrounding the Broadway United Methodist Church in Plattsburg.

First, the family decided to set up the Susan L. Hageman Memorial Fund to refurbish and upgrade the church’s outdated and semi-functional kitchen. The plan was to serve free meals to the community. Bruce admits that they had no idea what it would cost nor any notion as to how much they might receive.

Donations started coming in at the time of the funeral and have continued. The family is genuinely overwhelmed by the generosity – not only from family and friends and from within the church, but from Plattsburg, the surrounding communities, other parts of the US, and from as far away as Europe! Local craftsmen and volunteers have pitched in on the construction and remodeling. The fund has received over \$50,000, including a grant from the Missouri UM Foundation of \$6,000 to pay for the operating costs in 2023, the first year of operation.

In February, the first community meal was advertised as “Dinner on Broadway.” According to Pastor Cassie O’Brien Graham, sixty-five people attended, “The excitement in the room during that meal was amazing!”

Bi-monthly meals have continued, sometimes bringing



in up to 100 people. Guests include church members, but mostly they are people from the community. Each dinner brings new stories of how people discovered the “Dinner on Broadway” and their appreciation for the food and the sense of community.

The dream for how the kitchen can be used is also expanding. Community partners have come on board, with Parents as Teachers holding cooking classes, the Plattsburg Fall Festival Committee preparing food for their fundraisers, and the local senior center using the kitchen as their backup facility. The space even hosts funeral dinners for the wider community.

Bruce, his three adult daughters and their families are all active church members where their mom once cooked meals for funerals and church functions. Now, the Susan Lynn Hageman Memorial Kitchen continues her legacy. “It happened thanks to the grace, generosity, and kindness of so many people,” says Bruce, and it “will do great things for people long after we are all gone.”

