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New Biz Plan Pays for Food At WTC Site

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On Sept. 11, restaurants near Ground Zero sent whatever food they had on hand to feed relief and rescue workers. In those first days, the restaurant owners pitched in without regard to finances.

As weeks turned into months, however, some downtown restaurateurs who have suffered economic hardship began to ask the Salvation Army, which had organized part of the food effort, what they could do to continue to help — but this time, for pay.

Now, the Salvation Army together with Whitsons Food Service, a Huntington-based company, is offering local restaurants the chance to do business at Ground Zero.

Kitchenette, a popular restaurant on West Broadway at Warren Street, and Pig & Whistle on Greenwich Street, were the first to participate in the program, which was announced last week.

Lisa Hall, partner and co-chef at Kitchenette, said she and partner Ann Nickinson provided 200 Thanksgiving dinners, and on Friday they sent 500 portions of beef stew.

"We're helping people out, and it will help us," said Hall, who was at the eatery working the breakfast shift the morning of the terrorist attacks. For five weeks afterward, the restaurant, which was in the frozen zone, was closed. By Oct. 15, the owners had cleaned up enough to reopen.

The plan, called the New York City Restaurant Revitalization Program, aims to address concerns about local participation and "revitalize" area restaurants. Also, said Erin Norton, a Whitsons employee helping to manage several food service sites for the Salvation Army, people receiving food may decide to visit the restaurants after the cleanup is completed.

Whitsons will coordinate what is needed — "so that everybody doesn't do quarter roasted chickens," said Douglas Whitcomb, president of the company — and the Salvation Army, working through Whitsons, will foot the bill. No one restaurant is large enough to provide the approximately 11,000 meals still being served daily at the hazardous materials tent. Whitsons picks up the food and moves it in refrigerated trucks.

Restaurants nearest Ground Zero, and thus hardest hit, receive highest priority to be included, with those in areas further away ranked accordingly.

Also, some volunteers who had worked in a now-ended Red Cross-funded program to prepare food for Ground Zero and other sites have complained that out-of-towners are volunteering but that they no longer know where to go to offer their help.

Rachael Gulley of the Salvation Army said that local volunteers are needed to help warm and serve food, and that they may contact her through volunteers_wtc@hotmail.com or by calling 212-337-7461.

Volunteers can also visit the Salvation Army on 14th Street between Sixth and Seventh Avenues.

For information about the restaurant revitalization program, call 877-944-8755.

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