



# Empty Bowls PROJECT

*Lisa Blackburn and John Hartom*

use, collected a \$5 donation from each guest, and smiled broadly as they saw their own bowl selected. The school string quartet provided background music.

### **A Magical Moment**

As the meal was drawing to a close, my wife, Lisa Blackburn, shared some basic information about hunger in the Detroit area and then, to the surprise of the guests, we asked them to keep the bowls that they had selected as a reminder of all the empty bowls in the world. The room fell silent. They looked at their bowls, then at one another, and then again at their bowls. People clutched the bowls to

their chests. Some wept. We knew that something very powerful had happened and that we had both the opportunity and the responsibility to see that the magic of that moment not be allowed to end.

### **The Empty Bowls Project**

During the next several months, we distributed information packets about what we officially named The Empty Bowls Project. To our great surprise and satisfaction, return forms began to arrive indicating that the project was working in many places across the country.

Today, events have been held across the United States and Canada, and in New Zealand, Germany, Finland, England, and Hong Kong. Requests for information have come from individuals in over 100 countries. Empty Bowls events have now raised tens of millions of dollars for organizations fighting hunger. The events have also raised public awareness about hunger and have provided students of all ages the chance to work for positive change in their own communities and beyond.

Each group organizing an event selects the hunger-fighting organization to receive the money raised. Most often, the proceeds are utilized within the community where the event takes place and this has often resulted in lasting relationships between the students and the broader community.

### **The Imagine Render Group**

Empty Bowls presented the need for us to have a nonprofit organization. We created The Imagine Render Group a 501(c) 3 organization dedicated to positive and lasting change through the arts, education, and projects that build community. We have recently built a new gas kiln with all the firings dedicated to Empty Bowls and other peace and justice issues. Imagine Render is supported by T-shirt sales, Empty Bowls booths at two annual art fairs, the donation of equipment, and the occasional grant.

Committed to helping the people of the greater New Orleans area as they continue their struggle to recover from the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, we are working to create several major

**T**he Empty Bowls Project is an international, grassroots, crafts-based effort to end hunger. It started as what we thought would be a one-time luncheon to raise money for my school district food drive. That was in the fall of 1990. We asked my ceramics students at Bloomfield Hills Lahser High School in Detroit if they were willing to make 120 bowls, enough for the entire school staff. They accepted the challenge enthusiastically and set about throwing, decorating, and firing the bowls.

On the day of the event, students set up a long table to display the bowls, served soup and bread to staff members as they selected a bowl to

Empty Bowls activities, which we hope you will choose to join. We will help make and gather bowls for the food bank in New Orleans as they organize their first Empty Bowls event scheduled for March. You and your students can help. Contact the food bank and make arrangements to provide bowls for their event or hold your own and send some or all of the proceeds to them.

#### **Food Relief for New Orleans**

We have created a new undertaking aimed at raising money for food relief in New Orleans called The Empty Bowls Mardi Gras Party Project. We will host the party on Mardi Gras, February 5, 2008. We are currently putting together a packet of information on how to organize one of these events. It will have official Mardi Gras colors, gumbo recipes, and addresses for getting beads and lots of other tips for putting on your own Empty Bowls Mardi Gras Party. We hope to see hundreds of these

meals taking place across the country with the money going to the Community Food Bank of Greater New Orleans and Acadiana. They work with hundreds of emergency food providers and, last year, distributed over fifty-two million pounds of food to those in need.

As you are all aware, artists, art educators, and art students are frequently asked to donate their work for one fundraiser or another. Certainly, Empty Bowls would not enjoy its continuing success without the generosity of many thousands of ceramic artists, young and old. But there is much more to it. More than enough food is produced to feed every person on the planet, yet millions go hungry every day. Empty Bowls has allowed us to use our ability to make a simple bowl and our organizational skills to say "No, we do not accept the way things are. We can do better. We must do better." And since we can do something about it, we have chosen to do so.



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#### **WEB LINK**

[www.emptybowls.net](http://www.emptybowls.net)

#### **World Food Day is October 16, 2007**

World Food Day is a worldwide event designed to increase awareness, understanding, and action to alleviate hunger. It is observed every year on October 16. In the United States the endeavor is sponsored by 450 national, private, and voluntary organizations.

