

At Adams and Whitten, a pit stop with a purpose

(Continued from page 1) life habit, and just as when Dorchester's Nancy Jamison, 58, decided to load up the back of her pick-up with carrots and park it in front of her home. As her neighbors walked home from their jobs, she said, they scooped up the carrots. "They were gone in an hour and a half," she said. "I thought that this would be a great way to give, and that was important for me as a

retailer's trucks aren't able to load. Fair Foods then brings the surplus directly to their customers who look forward to purchasing an affordable bounty of produce, and sometimes bread, or even soda, too.

Venus Drain has been patronizing Fair Foods for several months after learning about the program from Project Bread, another Boston-based organization dedicated to ending hunger in Massachusetts. "We get the sodas and we share them with our neighbors. We enjoyed the tomatoes last week. We made some good spaghetti sauce," said Drain.

Daniel Fitzpatrick of Dorchester has been dropping by for two months after hearing about the program from his neighbors. "It takes patience to stand in line, but it's worth it. It can save you a lot of money," said Fitzpatrick. "Everyone looks forward to it. If they don't show up, people starve."

The outlook for next Friday's stop – and all the stops in between – is not looking good. It is Monday of the following week and Jamison stands on her front



Nancy Jamison started Fair Foods from a truck parked in front of her home back in the mid-1980s. Today she manages a volunteer corps of 100 and hustles to find surplus foods that wholesalers ship to various spots around Boston. Fair Foods then brings the surplus directly to its customers.

Photo by Kendra Lee Stanton

Dorchester stops for Fair Foods:

Adams Templeton, 455 Adams Str., Friday 10:30 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Dorchester Boys and Girls Club, 15 Talbot Ave. Tuesday, 4 to 5:30 p.m.

Franklin Hill Apartments, 15 Shandon Road, Wednesday 2 to 2:30 p.m.

Codman Global Ministries Boston Project, 670 Washington St., Saturday, 12 to 1:30 p.m.

Codman Senior Building, 784 Washington St., Saturday 3:30 to 4:30 p.m.

Field's Corner, Cleveland Middle School 11 Charles St., Thursday, 4:30 to 6 p.m.

Kelly House, 1363 Dorchester Ave., Friday, 1:30 to 2:30 p.m.

Bowdoin Street Senior Building, 330 Bowdoin St., Friday 3:30 to 5 p.m.

More info at 617-288-6185, fairfoods.org

porch looking vexed. Jamison, with a long silver ponytail, is looking out at The Mover truck which has received some new footwear today. The Boston Transportation Department has given the truck the boot, citing that no commercial vehicles are permissible to park on this residential street.

With more than 40 scheduled Fair Food stops in the Boston area, about 1,500 people eating good in the neighborhood, the boot has to be paid off. So one volunteer donates \$500.00 from his savings and goes down to pay the tickets, taking along \$8 in nickels from Jamison. In 18 years of running Fair Foods, though, this is not the first red tape Jamison and her group have encountered.

"We don't have a big bank account, so we really have to count on faith to do what we do here. And we've depended on faith. We're always having a crisis. But 95 percent of the time, we get through the crisis."

"It's a difficult world we live in today if you don't walk with faith, because there's so much disappointment," says Fair Foods volunteer Stacy Sutherland.

In the last 20 years, Jamison herself has battled cancer, epilepsy and presently she is

living with multiple sclerosis. However, she remarks, "Many have it a lot harder than me, and I'm grateful for the new medicines that have saved me. Thank God for my many blessings."

Also, since Fair Foods does not operate as most other non-profit organizations (e.g. paying out salaries and fundraising), but rather as an informal group of committed volunteers, its existence has been threatened repeatedly.

Jamison estimates that she has poured some \$800,000 plus of her own money, netted from rehabilitating homes and selling them, into Fair Foods. She also housed some members of her volunteer crew – rent free – in the real estate she owned before selling the homes.

"My board of directors, my entire family, they said, 'Do not give that money to Fair Foods, Nancy.' But they were coming from the standpoint of seeing me very ill. Until 1998, I could not drive, I could not do all the things I used to do normally," she said.

Still, Jamison says she has no regrets about investing her personal earnings into Fair Foods; the investment has made her feel "free," she said. "The accomplishment has been great." Jamison grew up outside of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, in a Mennonite family. She left home at an early age to distance herself from a "very troubled family." Jamison never finished high school. But where her formal education may have been cut short, her classroom is a vast one in which she instructs people, especially youth, in everything from carpentry to social activism.

The yard that abuts Jamison's property is a perennial show and tell, colorful benches built from scrap wood are parked under tall shady

trees. The benches are known as "Seats of Consciousness," an offshoot of Fair Foods' work in letting no good thing – be it food or wood – go to waste. The benches are built from recycled wood into beautiful custom furniture which is purchased by businesses and organizations all over the greater Boston area. Boston University just ordered 12 to be placed on Marsh Plaza, around the MLK Sculpture of Doves flying to the sky.

Between feeding and seating people, it is clear that Jamison's time and energies are at a premium.

"People call you crazy because you're a giver... You expect your friends to give and to straighten out and help. We have a situation in this country where it's abnormal to be a giver."

"Am I crazy? Do I seem crazy to you? Do you think a crazy person could have gotten \$200 million of food out to people six days a week?"

Given the demands of operating an organization with such a rigorous schedule and such a lofty mission, how does Jamison keep going?

Sometimes it's the thought that at least one person is relying on Fair Foods, she said.

"Every single Tuesday at 4 o'clock, the phone will ring and there will be a guy who will say, 'Y'all gonna be up at the Boys and Girls Club today, Nancy?' I say, 'We'll be up there, man!' He says, 'You got good food?' I say, 'We always have good food.' He says, 'You sure do, Nancy. See you up there!'" Sometimes, it's the knowledge of the 10,000 families in Eastern Massachusetts who rely upon Fair Foods.

"Fair Foods has become a social event for people. And it's become a family, we call it a 'fair family.' It is a very needed thing," said Jamison.

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