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For Immediate Release
December 22, 2009

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Thanksgiving in February

*Help the Hungry by dining out in Montgomery County
on Tuesday, February 23rd 2010*

Montgomery County, MD ----- For over 20 years, Montgomery County residents have been raising money for their neighbors in need simply by dining out! Every year Interfaith Works, a local nonprofit agency, coordinates a hunger relief fundraiser called ***Thanksgiving in February*** to help raise crucial funds for eleven local agencies that provide food and grocery money to the hungry. This year, over 60 restaurants in the County have signed on as “sharing restaurants” and will donate a percentage of their sales for one day. This year, residents will be dining out for Thanksgiving in February on **Tuesday, February 23rd, 2010.**

Proceeds from the event are distributed by Interfaith Works to eleven local agencies and food banks that are working to help feed the thousands of people in Montgomery County who are at-risk for hunger. Beneficiaries are Bethesda Cares, Bethesda HELP, Damascus HELP, Gaithersburg HELP, Germantown HELP, Community Vision, Manna Food Center, Olney HELP, Rockville HELP, Shepherd's Table and WUMCO HELP.

Although hunger and poverty can be invisible in our affluent community, many of our neighbors are in need, and the needs are growing. Almost 40,000 children in Montgomery County schools qualify for free and reduced meals, and over 70,000 individuals qualify to receive food from local food banks. The “self-sufficiency” standard in Montgomery County for a family with one adult, one preschooler and one school-age child is \$68,086, about four times higher than the \$17,300 federal poverty line.

As the economy continues to soften, more families are finding it harder to stretch their dollars and need help getting food. Manna Food Center, headquartered in Rockville, MD, has seen this rising need – requests for food are up over 50% since the recession began and they have distributed over 3 million pounds of food this year.

“Thanksgiving in February is more important than ever this year,” says Barbara Garlock, Director of Development and Community Outreach at *Interfaith Works*. “Hunger and the need for food in our community is growing at a faster pace than local helping agencies can meet, and many of our neighbors have empty pantries. Thanksgiving in February is a fun and simple way for everyone in the community, to band together and get involved while supporting local businesses.”

Thanksgiving in February is a beloved tradition for County residents and restaurant owners alike. Starting in January each year, eager residents select from the list of sharing restaurants, make reservations, and round up groups from their congregations, sports teams, clubs, neighborhoods, offices and friends. And restaurant owners are happy to fill their tables.

“We've been a part of Thanksgiving in February since its inception, because it's the right thing to do,” says Bill Edelblut, of O'Donnell's Restaurant in the Kentlands community in Gaithersburg. “We are proud to be a community partner.” Adam Greenberg, owner of Potomac Pizza, with four participating outlets adds, “ Not only is it contributing to a good cause, but our receipts go up and all my customers are excited. It's a win-win!”

Visit www.thanksgivinginfebruary.org to find a complete listing of Montgomery County restaurants where you can participate in Thanksgiving in February on Tuesday, February 23rd and dine out to help the hungry.

For more information or an interview with *Interfaith Works'* Director of Development and Community Outreach, Barbara Garlock, call (301) 315-1096 or the Interfaith Works' office at (301) 762-8682. For contact information for representatives of Bethesda Cares, Bethesda HELP, Damascus HELP, Gaithersburg HELP, Germantown HELP, Community Vision, Manna Food Center, Olney HELP, Rockville HELP, Shepherd's Table and WUMCO HELP, contact jkirby@iworksmc.org or (301) 315-1092.

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