



p.A1: At a church on the Upper West Side, Michael Ennes, who may be the best soup kitchen chef in New York City prepares multicourse meals for the poor. A recent entrée? New Jersey bison stew.



**RESOURCEFUL** Michael Ennes is the chef at the Broadway Community soup kitchen.

Help **Broadway Community Inc.** provide nutritious food and many social services to the poor and homeless in New York City. ([www.broadwaycommunity.org](http://www.broadwaycommunity.org)) or 601 West 114<sup>th</sup> Street, New York, NY 10025. 212-864-6100, x121



A volunteer sets out food for diners at the soup kitchen, which is on upper Broadway.

## On the Soup Line, Endive and Octopus

EVEN at the soup kitchen, everyone's a critic.

The multicourse lunch that Michael Ennes cooked in the basement of Broadway Presbyterian Church last week started with a light soup of savoy and napa cabbages. The endive salad was dressed with basil vinaigrette. For the main course, Mr. Ennes simmered New Jersey bison in wine and stock flavored with fennel and thickened with olive oil roux.

But some diners thought the bison was a little tough, and the menu discordant. "He's good, but sometimes I think the experimentation gets in the way of good taste," said Jose Terrero, 54. Last year, Mr. Terrero made a series of what he called inappropriate financial decisions, including not paying his rent. He now sleeps at a shelter. He has eaten at several New York City soup kitchens, and highly recommends Mr. Ennes's food.

Mr. Ennes, a former English major who reads Thomas Paine and wears a black and white neckerchief with a turquoise clasp, might be the best soup kitchen chef in New York City. On Thanksgiving, when most of the cooks at the city's other 470-some soup kitchens simply roasted turkey, he prepared "turkey four ways," including one with mango-ginger glaze and tropical fruit stuffing.

There will be no canned green beans or bologna sandwiches. Mr. Ennes insists on homemade stocks, oils without trans fats, organic peanut butter and local produce when he can get it. (That's not to say he won't stretch a meal with some frozen

turkey patties or use a little powdered soup base in a pinch.)

Despite the care he puts into his cooking, he doesn't mind a little criticism.

"They're still customers, whether they're paying \$100 a plate or nothing," Mr. Ennes said. "One thing we do here is listen to people and let them complain. Where else can a homeless person get someone to listen to them?"

Mr. Ennes, 55, cooks about 500 meals a week for people who come to the church on the corner of Broadway and 114th Street in search of a free breakfast or lunch. At night, a handful of women in need of shelter sleep upstairs. He feeds them, too.



He relies on donations for his ingredients, like bison steaks; the bread is from Le Bernardin.



All Photos by: Tony Cenicola/The New York Times

**The soup kitchen serves 500 meals a week.**

The people who eat at Broadway Community Inc., the social service organization that employs Mr. Ennes and rents space in the church, are only a small slice of the 260,000 New Yorkers who every week visit some emergency feeding program. About 40 percent of the people who eat at Mr. Ennes's table live in a shelter or take cover in the parks or the subways. The rest have a temporary home of some sort, on a friend's couch or the roof of a building where they know the super. Some don't earn enough to cover rent.

Mr. Ennes relies on the Food Bank for New York City, donations and grants, but he also employs the creativity of a desperate cook. When he's out of wine, he uses fruit juice or borrows communion wine from the understanding pastor at the church upstairs. (He has to make sure all the alcohol is cooked off; many of his clients are trying to recover from alcoholism.)

The bread basket that sits on each table is filled with rolls that were baked at Le Bernardin the day before but never served. Le Bernardin is among nearly 150 high-end restaurants that regularly donate through City Harvest, a nonprofit that for 25 years has been "rescuing" extra food. The list of donors, which includes corporations, farms and grocery stores, totals more than 2,000. Without City Harvest, Mr. Ennes would be hard-pressed to present the menus he does.

Though the quality of the ingredients is often impeccable, he doesn't always know what he's going to get or what form it's going to take. Last week brought a large plastic sack of asparagus, both white stalks and pencil-thin green ones. They were beautiful, except all the tips had been snapped off. Before that, there was a shipment of pineapple slices, each with a star punched out of the middle, and several foil trays filled with braised baby octopus. He disguised some of the octopus in a soup and used the rest in a salad for the women's shelter.

Surprise contributions come from other sources, too. Mr. Ennes teaches cooking, nutrition and food service skills to homeless people, who in turn help prepare meals. In November, a student brought a leg of venison from his family in Georgia. Mr. Ennes used it for stock, which became the base for an Andalusian oxtail and lentil stew.

Before the stew was served, Mr. Ennes delivered a short food and nutrition lecture to a crowded dining room.

"We're dealing with the regions of Spain today," he said in a booming voice better suited to a different stretch of Broadway.

"The stew has no potatoes. It's served with rice and peas instead. That's what makes it Andalusian."

People dozed or babbled. Some couldn't understand a word of English. Those who did, though, were amused.

"He should have his own show," said Duwon Bryant, who drops into the center to shower, check e-mail and get a good meal before he heads back outside to find a place to sleep. No other soup kitchen has Broadway Community's mix of excellent cooking and supportive attitude, he said.

"I've been to them all and this is like gourmet," Mr. Bryant said. "Other places will give you slop and say it's better than nothing."

Some people said they prefer the food at a soul food soup kitchen in Harlem. Others like a slightly tonier East Side soup kitchen that has an automatic dishwasher and can use real plates. (Mr. Ennes hates serving his food on plastic-foam plates, but he says a dishwasher and the plumbing for it would cost about \$10,000.) But as with any restaurant whose focus is on refined ambiance, a seat at the East Side place comes at a cost.

"They don't let everybody in, so you wait on line and then you get turned away if they don't like how you look," said Patrick Garrelle, 44. "Their door policy is almost like a nightclub with a rope."

At Broadway Community, everyone gets to eat. There is no humiliating food line to stand in. Volunteers set each of Mr. Ennes's courses in front of the diners.

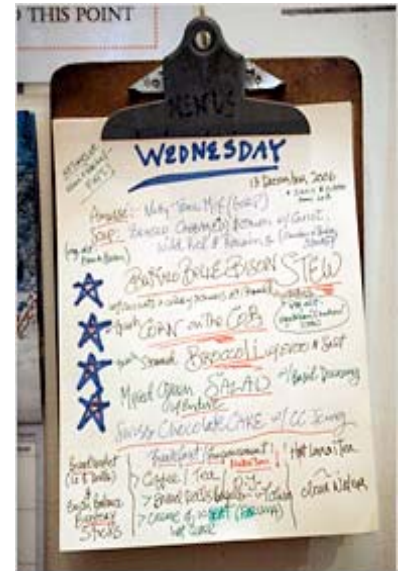
"When you force people to queue up for food, you encourage pushiness and aggressiveness and hardness," he said. "Sitting at a table and being served encourages community."

At one time, Mr. Ennes dreamed of being a starred chef. He was raised on the Upper West Side, and initially made money building restaurants. He turned to the kitchen, cooking in South Beach and the Florida Keys in the 1980s. In 1990, he opened a restaurant on Second Avenue and First Street in Manhattan called Orféo, hoping to attract the attention of food critics. It never did, and the restaurant closed after four years.

Things changed for Mr. Ennes on 9/11. His consulting job with a restaurant downtown vanished, and, like many others, he decided to make good on a longstanding intention to do more volunteer work. So he walked across the street from his apartment to volunteer at Broadway Community. In no time, he was the head chef, making \$30,000 a year plus health benefits.

He no longer dreams of feeding stars or getting one.

"I could have spent my life pampering the rich, which is a fine art," he said. "But I think I've found where I belong."



**DESSERT, TOO** A menu at the soup kitchen run by Broadway Community

### For the Hungry, Helping Hands

FOLLOWING are some food-related charities in New York City:

- CITY HARVEST** (917) 351-8700, [cityharvest.org](http://cityharvest.org). Delivers extra food from restaurants, farmers' markets and farms to more than 600 community food programs.
- CITYMEALS-ON-WHEELS** (212) 687-1234, [citymeals.org](http://citymeals.org). Provides meals to homebound elderly New Yorkers.
- FOOD BANK FOR NEW YORK CITY** (212) 566-7855, [foodbanknyc.org](http://foodbanknyc.org). Distributes food from the federal, state and local governments and from private donations to 1,200 soup kitchens, pantries, shelters and other programs.
- GOD'S LOVE WE DELIVER** (212) 294-8100, [glwd.org](http://glwd.org). Delivers meals to people with AIDS, cancer and other serious illnesses. ELAINE LOUIE