

# Here comes the judge with filet mignon

Homeless, poor treated to fine meal, \$10 tip for holidays at Osgoode Hall

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LIVING REPORTER

The wait staff was pretty high-powered. But then, so was the meal — lavish servings of filet mignon with fries, green beans and bread pudding, served with a smile by the Chief Justice of Ontario and an army of volunteers.

“This is the best food in the city,” said Elmer Biro, 77, who struggles to get by on a \$1,100 a month old-age pension but makes this once-a-year feast of seasoned and slow-cooked filet part of his Christmas tradition.

Even though times are tough, there was a bit of a respite in the dining room of Osgoode Hall yesterday where some 600 poor and homeless were treated to a gourmet-style dinner, topped off with a crisp new \$10 bill from a Toronto lawyer who co-founded the unusual feast, Martin Teplitsky.

While many others may be cutting back on presents and good cheer this year — and charities are seeing worrisome declines in donations — Teplitsky was dispensing both in



RICHARD LAUTENS/TORONTO STAR

Chief Justice Warren Winkler plays waiter yesterday as 600 or more disadvantaged dine well in Osgoode Hall.

his classic style, first shelling out \$2,600 to his butcher at the St. Lawrence Market for 206 lbs. worth of 4-oz. filet mignon portions, then \$6,000 in tens taken from a Best Buy bag, along with socks and a few Gore Tex jackets.

“I consider this one of the most useful things I do. It’s very satis-

fying to me. I believe everybody has an obligation to do something to make the world a better place,” said Teplitsky, a partner in the downtown firm Teplitsky Colson LLP.

Eleven years ago Teplitsky and his wife, Nancy Backhouse, now a Superior Court justice, founded the Lawyers Feed the Hungry Program

that serves about 1,200 meals (Wednesday supper, Thursday breakfast and Sunday brunch) every week at Osgoode Hall — helped by about \$300,000 in donations and dedicated volunteers.

One such was 16-year-old Anosknt Smith, a Sri Lankan orphan living with a Toronto uncle,

pleased to duplicate the kindness of strangers who took care of him in similar ways during the years before he made it to Canada.

Another was Peter Howe, a Grade 9 student racking up volunteer hours who was pleasantly surprised “to see something like this going on downtown, right next to city hall.”

Chief Justice Warren Winkler donned an apron to help out this year “because times are tough for people. When you’re in the court system it’s pretty obvious, maybe more than in other places.”

Among diners was Paul Chambers, 39, who lives in a shelter and relies on the lawyers’ food program. The Christmas serving of filet mignon is special, he said.

“I really like the atmosphere — the good food and good service. I think it’s very generous of them to give back to the community like this.”

Teplitsky is hoping donations from lawyers and law firms will allow him to expand the meal program to Friday nights, with both a sit-down meal and a takeout meal, to help the needy through their toughest time, weekends.

He used to draw kitchen duty but now has another responsibility — handing out those \$10 bills. “I’m busy being Santa,” he said.