

OUTSTANDING PUBLIC SERVICE

Rex Chandler

When pressed about why he began a lifelong journey of giving, and why the giving nearly always involves food – cooking it, serving it, donating it or raising money to buy it – restaurateur Rex Chandler says there may be ties to his childhood. He and his brothers were raised by a single mom, and she was “always concerned” about having enough to feed them. And then there’s the whole career aspect of the equation.

“I’ve been in fine dining throughout my whole career, almost 40 years,” Chandler says. It just makes sense “to give back to the community the best way you can.”

For Chandler and his crew at Chandlers Steakhouse, that means offering their services as chef, wait staff and venue.

“We donate time and food,” he says.

One of Chandler’s annual giving events is Father’s Day brunch. Chandler started the tradition years ago when he worked in Newport Beach, Calif. Back then, the money he collected for the brunch went to the Red Cross. These days, Chandler’s “man brunch” raises awareness for the Women’s and Children’s Alliance which receives 100 percent of the money.

“We donate the venue and the labor and ask our vendors to donate product,” Chandler says. Last Father’s Day, 250 attendees were served. “It’s really become a tradition,” he says, adding that many now make their reservations a year ahead.

In addition, Chandler supports the Idaho State Veterans Home and regularly donates gift certificates at local philanthropic auctions for private dinner parties. His dinners fetched about \$4,000 – twice – for the Idaho Humane Society.

But Chandler’s professional and personal passion to feed the hungry has spurred the focus of his giving. He has teamed up with the Idaho Foodbank to end hunger in



Rex Chandler and his staff host an Idaho Foodbank awareness luncheon once a month.

Photos by Laurie Pearman

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Idaho. Through his annual “Giving for Thanksgiving,” Chandler educates and talks with restaurant-goers about the statewide problem of hunger. “I match customer donations,” he says. With the money raised, “last year, several thousand meals went out.”

Perhaps most unique and helpful are the monthly luncheons. The restaurant is normally closed until dinnertime, but every third Thursday Chandler and his staff host an Idaho Foodbank awareness luncheon. See, Chandler says with a smile, “there is such a thing as free lunch.”

Besides being delicious, the three-course, five-star lunches are educational and a way to say thank-you to donors, says Adrienne M. Swain Smith, manager of development at Idaho Foodbank. In just four months, Chandler’s upscale lunches raised more than \$20,000, she says, “which allows us to provide the free emergency food to people in need statewide.”

Chandler says it’s just a way to give back. “It’s always important to give back to the community,” he says, “and I’m kind of proud of it.”