

Democrats Gave Food for Needy

By James J. Fisher

A Member of the Staff

The bushel baskets would be filled to the brim and then some, Joseph Gallucci remembered last night. A 5- pound chuck roast, sack of potatoes, onions, celery, canned goods, apples and oranges, coffee, sugar and bread were the staples.

“And whatever else we could find,” Gallucci recalls. “Hungry people need food.”

The year was 1934—forty years ago—but it could have been any of several years in the 30s when the depression pressed down on people. In those years, as a matter of course, Kansas City’s Democratic organizations fed 5,000 families every year with the bushel baskets for Christmas. Hundreds of others were fed Christmas day meals.

“We fed Republicans and Democrats and Independents—anybody that was hungry, anybody that needed a Christmas dinner for his wife and kids, and anybody that needed hope. It didn’t make any difference,” said Gallucci, a real estate broker and former ward leader.

Buying wholesale, the organization of T. J. Pendergast could put a bushel basket of food together for about four or five dollars, Gallucci recalled. The food was delivered Christmas eve as precinct captains in the various wards would take the baskets personally to those who needed them.

“The precinct captains knew who was hungry, who was busted out and didn’t have two dimes to rub together,” Gallucci said. “No, there weren’t any form to fill out. It was personal.”

Occasionally a family would “double up” on a precinct captain, taking a basket from him and then calling Pendergast headquarters at 1908 Main that they hadn’t received a basket.

“We always took another one by,” said Gallucci. “When the Boss said take one, you did just that.”

At the Christmas day meal, held at Marshall’s at Missouri avenue -and Main Street, or at King’s, 607 Main, doubling up was common. Gallucci said you could tell some of the people eating the meals hadn’t had anything for several days.

“Some of them would come back two, three times,” Gallucci said. “You looked the

other way.”

That was Christmas, 1934. Gallucci can remember the food baskets and the lines at Marshall's and the people as if it were yesterday. Most of them wore all their clothes, an overcoat, three shirts and a couple of pair of trousers. In their eyes was a look, one put there by being out of work two, three or four years. “There was no welfare, no social security, nothing,” said Gallucci.’

“Just hungry people. And don't think they were invisible. They were all over. People think times are rough now? Listen, this is peaches and cream compared to those year.”