

The top of the page features a large background image of three people in blue t-shirts with the Intel logo on the back, painting a wall. On the left, there is a blue graphic element with the text "Intel Involved" in white. The Intel logo is also visible in the top right corner of the background image.

Intel Involved

One Story: Small Gestures

Like a mass of sleepwalkers, they shuffle down a ramp to be swallowed by the damp, dimly lit subterranean garage beneath O'Bryant Square in downtown Portland. The hunched-over old, the discouraged young, the wide-eyed children, the anxious couples gripping each other's hands—all rub shoulders while crowding near the roped-in food service area on the puddle strewn concrete floor of the low-ceilinged garage.

"Number 1" shouts out a man at the front of the crowd. A talkative woman in a wheel chair wearing a stained green University of Oregon sweatshirt under a well worn grey jacket comes forward. One by one the ticket holders advance.

"198" yells the man. A teenage girl in a floor-length dress dragging on the floor and overburdened with a bulging backpack steps forward, hands ticket number 198 to the man, and faces rows of food-laden tables attended by eager, smiling volunteers.

It's all there, ready for the stiff paper plate in the girl's hand. Fresh fruit, sandwiches, Greek yogurt, pastries, and much more. At one table, students from De La Salle North Catholic High School in Portland serve mixed fruit, potato and macaroni salads, and chips. At another table, two eager volunteers wearing blue Intel Involved t-shirts ladle vegetarian dahl, made with pinto beans, curry, ginger paste and other ingredients, onto the girl's plate. That table is the handiwork of Small Gestures Inc, a nonprofit created in early 2011 by Purushottam Goel, an architect with Intel's client chipset team in Hillsboro, Oregon.

The free meal event, organized by Potluck in the Park, a nonprofit focused on feeding those in need, has been occurring every Sunday for 20 years. Goel and other Intel volunteers associated with Small Gestures come to O'Bryant Square the third Sunday of each month to join dozens of other groups providing meals to the homeless and desperate. "We do it later in the month because that's when paychecks, Social Security, and other income is spent and demand is higher," Goel says.

"Vegetarianism and compassion are common values among us," Goel says of the Small Gestures group. "That is the main thing that brought us together, and continues to bind us. We created this nonprofit to show our compassion by providing hot, fresh vegetarian meals to the needy and poor. This way our efforts align with our values."

Goel's day began Sunday morning at the Hare Krishna Vedic Center in a complex of light tan one-level cinderblock storage and office buildings. The Center rents its kitchen to Small Gestures for a small fee. Leaving their shoes outside the entry, Goel and several other volunteers went in to the Center's small, narrow kitchen with all the supplies needed to prepare their dishes. Near the entrance is a Small Gestures poster on a bulletin board. "We can do no great things, only small things with great love - Mother Teresa," is written at the top.



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For two hours the group carefully mixed ingredients for vegetarian dishes, stirred the pots over a hot induction cooktop and carefully emptied the steaming pots into containers. Six casserole pans, each covered with Saran Wrap, were then carried out to a car and readied for the ride to Portland.

The driver of the car was one of several other Intel volunteers who gathered for the next stage of the process, delivering the food to O'Bryant Square and serving it. About 20 Intel employees are involved with Small Gestures, so they split up the work, with different groups buying the food, cooking, delivering, serving, and cleaning up. "Intel is a great, great employer letting us do this, giving us time to help the community" said Shankar Gupta, one of the Intel volunteers.

All the Small Gestures members report their volunteer hours to Intel because under the Intel Involved Matching Grant Program the Intel Foundation will donate \$10 to a nonprofit for every hour Intel employees report volunteering there. In 2011, the Small Gestures volunteers reported 450 volunteer hours, generating an Intel Foundation donation of \$4,500. "If we had more people involved, we could serve more often and generate more hours and more dollars that we could put back into Small Gestures," said Goel.

In good weather, the Potluck in the Park event is held in the open air at the Square; in bad weather it is moved to the garage below. On this Sunday, because it was a rainy day the Small Gestures volunteers drove their car into the basement parking garage and unloaded it there. At 3 p.m. they began serving. At one point they served a family of four, a mother and father with 7-year-old twin girls wearing soiled pink and grey coats. After navigating their way through the food service area, the family sat down cross-legged on the cold concrete floor next to a wall. "We've been homeless for about three weeks," Charlie, the father, said wearily. "We're spending nights at the Family Winter Shelter in Portland."

Charlie said his family usually uses bus tickets provided by the shelter to travel for lunch at The Father's Heart Street Ministry in Clackamas, OR. Then they spend their days at a library or mall. They read about the Potluck in the Park program in Street Roots, a newspaper produced by an organization of the same name that serves the homeless and poverty-stricken. "Our main focus is our children," Charlie said. "We're trying not to focus on the bad things."

As the afternoon progressed, the waiting crowd dwindled. Finally the announcer shouted out "595" and the last ticketed person entered the food service area. Some people eager for second servings then went through again, but the garage slowly began to empty out. The rain had stopped so the sun greeted them as they emerged onto the sidewalk.

At the end the Small Gestures team packed up and viewed the scene with a satisfied look. "We learn at our temple that we must help needy people," said Goel. "It's a pretty humbling experience."

