



## Anchorage

# This Anchorage gas station owner didn't want anyone to go hungry on Thanksgiving Day

By Tegan Hanlon

Updated: December 2, 2017

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Insook Baik, the owner of the Shell gas station on Mountain View Drive, ladles gravy on mashed potatoes on Thanksgiving Day. She has served free meals at the gas station's convenience store for about eight years. (Tegan Hanlon/ADN)

Insook Baik knows what it's like to go to bed hungry.

She grew up in South Korea during the Korean War, she said, and her family didn't always have enough to eat. But things for her are different now.

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"I got a lot of blessings from God," Baik said on Thursday as she ladled gravy on mashed potatoes in the crowded convenience store at the Shell gas station that she owns in Anchorage's Mountain View neighborhood.

For about eight years, Baik has bought enough food to serve hundreds of free meals at the store each Thanksgiving Day.



The Mountain View Shell station's sign advertising its free Thanksgiving meals from 12:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. (Bob Hallinen / ADN)

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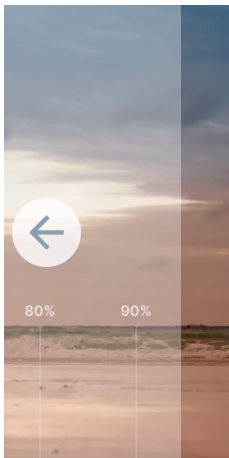
"She's fallen in love with the community here. It's one of the few places where people will give their last dollar to each other," said Baik's son, Peter, who is visiting from California. "I think that pulls at her heartstrings."



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Baik said she sees immigrants in Mountain View, just like herself. She said she also sees people who look hungry.

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On Thursday, dozens of people stood in a line that snaked among the convenience store shelves.

Baik and a collection of volunteers, including her son, assembled to-go containers brimming with ham, turkey, mashed potatoes, gravy, corn, stuffing and pumpkin pie topped with whipped cream.

"I want everything perfect, so it looks like what I would feed my children," Baik said. Everything she purchased for the day, she said, was exactly what she would feed her family.





Glen Ellis, the manager at the Shell gas station in Mountain View, helped assemble to-go containers of free food Thursday. He said more and more people show up for the meals each year. (Tegan Hanlon/ADN)





Insook Baik and her son, Peter Baik, make mashed potatoes Thursday at the Mountain View gas station. (Tegan Hanlon/ADN)

Baik expected they would serve at least 600 people at the convenience store Thursday afternoon. Last year, she said, they gave out about 620 meals.

With the warm meal, each person in line also got a can of soda and a banana. If they asked for more than one container of food, they got it.

"I just feel so blessed," said one man who started to cry as he approached the front of the line. "This is such a blessing for me."

Another man, Harvey Koweluk, took his container of food outside and sat on the nearby curb.

"I'm very grateful and God bless the Shell," Koweluk, 57, said.





Insook Baik, owner of the Mountain View Shell station, talks about the free Thanksgiving lunch on Wednesday. (Bob Hallinen / ADN)

Baik said she has lived in Anchorage for about 35 years and has owned the Mountain View gas station for about a decade. She also owns another Shell station in Midtown.

On Thursday, she said, "I just feel happy."

The day before, she had picked up turkey for the Thanksgiving Day meals and as she drove with her car full of food, she said, "I cried, 'Thank you God.' I was hungry all the time and now I can serve."

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## Tegan Hanlon

Tegan Hanlon was a reporter for the Anchorage Daily News between 2013 and 2019. She now reports for Alaska Public Media.



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# As volunteers distribute free meals, Anchorage's giving spirit shines on a Thanksgiving unlike any other

By Emily Mesner

Updated: November 26, 2020

Published: November 26, 2020



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Volunteers help Insook Baik, owner of the Mountain View Shell Gas Station, left, box free Thanksgiving meals to-go for community members in Anchorage on Thursday, Nov. 26, 2020. (Emily Mesner / ADN)

Slices of turkey, scoops of mashed potatoes, ladles of gravy, wedges of pumpkin pie and dollops of whipped cream — these

Thanksgiving dinner staples were shared by many in Anchorage this year thanks to the efforts of volunteers and community members.

Insook Baik, who owns the Shell gas station in Mountain View, on Thursday continued her decade-long tradition of passing out free Thanksgiving meals for community members.



Jacqueline Silook and her son Pulefano Mamona wait outside in line at the Mountain View Shell gas station in Anchorage for free Thanksgiving meals on Thursday. Silook has 11 children and was able to pick up a meal for each of them. She brought their birth certificates as proof, but gas station owner Insook Baik trusted her and just asked that the meals not go to waste. "She's such a sweetheart," Silook said. (Emily Mesner / ADN)



Insook Baik slides a bag of free Thanksgiving meals under a piece of plexiglass to a person waiting in line outside the gas station. (Emily Mesner / ADN)

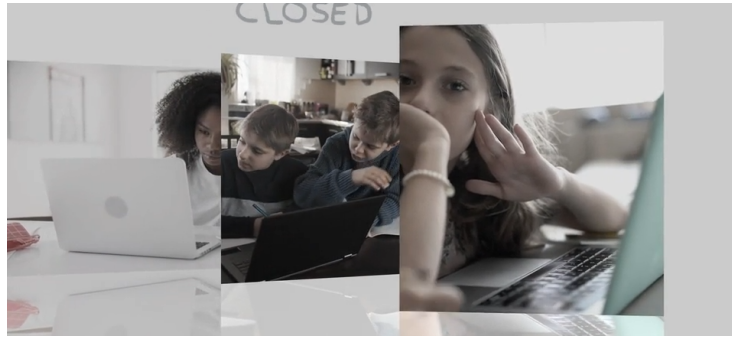


Pulefano Mamona carries free Thanksgiving meals to his mother's car. (Emily Mesner / ADN)

Baik frantically ran across the store for more hand sanitizer one moment, stuffed bags with chips and drinks the next, and

helped carry to-go meals to a woman's car. Unable to hug a customer who came to visit due to social distancing, Baik ran back inside to continue helping.

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She and a team of volunteers, including Josh Kim, a former pastor at the First Korean Presbyterian Church, hustled as they handed out hundreds of free meals to a steady and growing line.

"This is something I have to do," she said while helping a customer from behind a plexiglass screen. "I'm gonna give my heart. I am happy."



Insook Baik, owner of the Mountain View Shell gas station in Anchorage, calls for the next person in line to approach for their free Thanksgiving meal. (Emily Mesner / ADN)

In Midtown, cars remained at a standstill in the east lane of C Street north of Fireweed Lane as drivers waited for their free Thanksgiving meal from the drive-thru at Kriner's Diner. Celebrations rang from inside the restaurant as they received

donations from loyal patrons.



Vehicles on C Street wait to turn into the Kriner's Diner parking lot for a drive-thru free Thanksgiving meal. (Emily Mesner / ADN)

The Salvation Army also continued its annual tradition of delivering free meals to seniors and those in need as part of their Older Alaskans Program.

“I think that there is definitely a higher need due to the pandemic,” said Lessa Peter, communications manager for the Salvation Army’s Alaska division. This year, 150 meals went to individuals in transitional housing who are either quarantined because they have tested positive for COVID-19 or because they are waiting for their results.

Roughly 30 volunteers assisted on Thanksgiving Day, helping package, drive and deliver about 550 meals — an increase from last year’s 400 distributed meals.



“They choose to help out in the community and do something for somebody who’s in need,” Peter said of the volunteers. “Even though we’re in a pandemic, you’re still seeing people who want to help any way they can. They have empathy for those who are struggling in the pandemic.”



Volunteers work to box free Thanksgiving meals as part of The Salvation Army. 550 meals were delivered to seniors and those in need this year. (Photo courtesy of The Salvation Army)



### Emily Mesner

Emily Mesner is a multimedia journalist for the Anchorage Daily News, National Park and Preserve and the Western Arctic National Parklands in Kotzebue, at the Cordova Times and at the Jackson Citizen Patriot in Jackson, Michigan.



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# Mountain View gas station hands out hundreds of free Thanksgiving meals to community members

By Tess Williams

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Mt. View Shell Station owner Insook Baik confirms how many free Thanksgiving Day dinners a person needs on Thursday, Nov. 25, 2021. (Bill Roth / ADN)

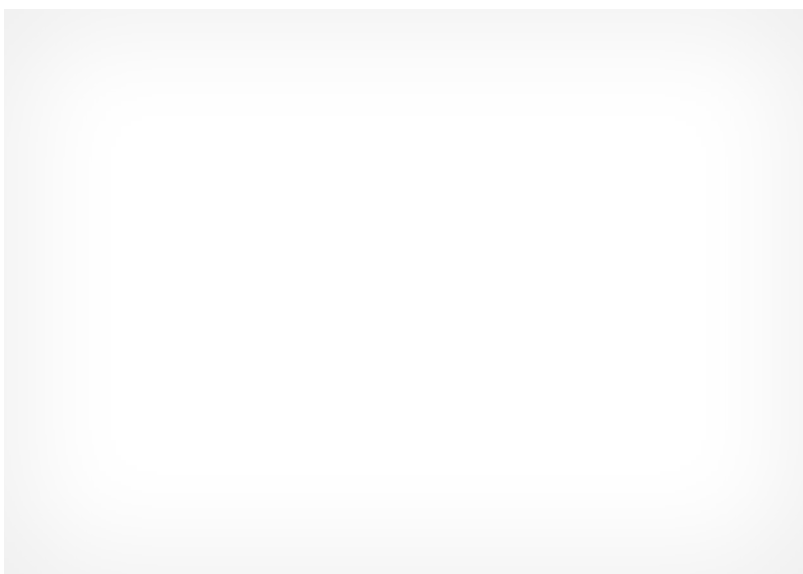
For more than a decade, Insook Baik has made Thanksgiving dinner each year for hundreds of people.

As the owner of the Shell gas station in Mountain View, she said she knows there are many people in the community who may not otherwise have a hot meal. And she wants to take care of her neighbors, so each year, she stocks up enough ham, turkey, corn, mashed potatoes, stuffing and pumpkin pie for the whole neighborhood.

Glen Ellis, who is a manager at the store, said he and his wife help prepare the food. This year, that meant about four days' worth of work, he said. A few volunteers, many of whom work nearby, dished up plates on Thanksgiving Day and passed them to people out of a walk-up window or drive-thru.



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The number of people stopping by for a meal has steadily increased as the years have gone by, Ellis said. This year he expects they'll serve somewhere near 900 plates. Things during the pandemic have been hard, and a lot of people in the community have struggled to pay their bills.

"People that have homes are hurting, the money is running shorter this year and things cost a lot more," he said. "Anything given back to the community helps."

The best part of the tradition for Baik is just seeing joy on others' faces and hearing about their successes, she said.

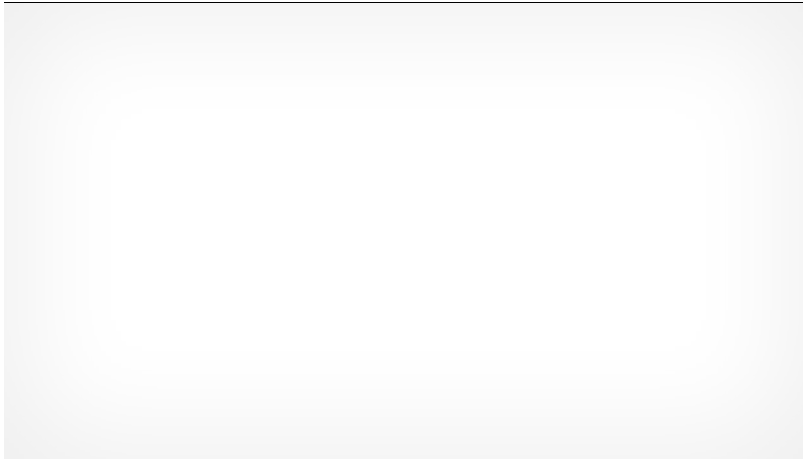
"One man a couple years ago, he said, 'I was hungry, I moved here with no job, no car, no apartment, but you gave me food,' " she said. The man returned several years later and told her he was employed and had a place to live, according to Baik. He gave her money to help pay for more supplies for the next year.

On Thursday, Baik's face lit up as a regular customer walked in the doors with a saxophone and played a jingle for a crowd of volunteers in the kitchen.

As the music drifted through the aisles, she stepped outside and into the snow to show a man to the pickup window line where he could get his meal. Once she was back inside, Baik stepped to her side of the window, passing bags of warm food into the hands of others.



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"Happy Thanksgiving," she said, the corners of her eyes crinkling as her face mask covered her smile.

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### Tess Williams

Tess Williams is a reporter for the Anchorage Daily News, focusing on breaking news. Before joining the ADN in 2019, she was a reporter for the Grand Forks Herald in North Dakota and previously helped cover the Nebraska Legislature for The Associated Press. Contact her at [twilliams@adn.com](mailto:twilliams@adn.com).



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