

First Friendsgiving - Report Back!

November 23, 2024: City of Palo Alto, Magical Bridge and Kafenia Peace Collective

Absolutely amazing event, everyone loved it, very deep and impactful!! 90+ Attended
People want to keep gathering and have this gathering next year.

First 'Friendsgiving' strengthens community, holiday spirit

Kristine Lin and Sophie Zhang
November 26, 2024



Palo Alto residents enjoy a hearty dinner during the first Palo Alto Friendsgiving on Saturday at the Lucie Stern Community Center. According to Mary Jane Moutsanas, who helped coordinate the event, she hoped to bring a greater sense of unity to attendees. "The event has turned out amazing," Moutsanas said. "It's like right here we work on opening ourselves up to each other and feeling like we're all in this together."

Purpose: Come as neighbors, leave as friends.

How well did the event achieve its goals of fostering community and connection, especially across generations?

Reflections: Yes, we did achieve it. People particularly appreciated having the youth hosts, and getting to know more personally people they had never met before. There was an authenticity to all the interactions that challenged the dominant achievement, status culture of this area. Particularly, the co-hosts (youth and elder), mixing tables with people who didn't know each other, the conversation questions to deepen connections and the group dance (Greek & DJ) all helped build a community and connected spirit.

This phrase was echoed by many attendees:

- "This was the first time in 24 years I felt part of Palo Alto."

- It's very rare to be able to properly meet people at events like this, so it was great!
- "Everyone, all ages, seemed to have a great time."
- "It was so cool to connect with people, some even from countries like Egypt."

Paly Voice Article: [First Friendsgiving Strengthens Community, Holiday Spirit](#)

Participation: Sold out, capacity event, very diverse crowd.

- 90+ attendees, from across the Peninsula, everyone either lives, works or visits Palo Alto, across all neighborhoods. Newcomers who arrived a few months ago to 30+ years.
- Invites to Magical Bridge Playground, Kafenia mailing lists and networks, ad in Palo Alto Weekly

Program/Flow:

- Welcome: welcome table, assigned to a table with a youth/elder co-host (process could be easier next time)
- High School Band/Hang out: “It was a highlight of my evening” said someone of the band. We set up socializing spaces but people went to their tables right away. For some, the music was loud.
- Appetizers/Tables: enjoyed free beer and wine, appetizers from Ada’s, started conversations
- Palo Alto Map: People posted where in the world they are from (an artifact for the City).
- Dinner: Food: lasagne from Italico (donated), soup from Redwood Cafe, baklava from Evvia (donated)
- Conversations were very powerful at the tables; some did all the questions; others did just a few.
- Ice Breaker - “Guess the Pictures” : people loved guessing. It was supposed to be before dinner but many did it after.
 - Palo Alto History Museum (Karen Holman) took the photos to display in the Museum.
- Dancing: Transitioned from dinner to everyone joining a big line in a Greek dance. It was amazing how nearly everyone joined in, and wanted to keep doing more Greek dance. We transitioned to the DJ with song list based on what people requested in advance or the night of. People would have stayed longer if they could.

Conclusions

- People in the Palo Alto area really want a much stronger community.
- People in the Palo Alto want to connect meaningfully (not superficially)
- People in the Palo Alto area want to connect with people they wouldn’t normally meet, different ages.
- How can we do more?

Prepared by Mary Jane Moutsanas, Kafenia Peace Collective