

For four years, LeRoy Grubbs has been on a mission to help Harvesters feed Kansas City. In his first year as organizer of the fundraising event called [Empty Bowls](#), he single-handedly created 600 ceramic bowls. Now, because he has some left from other years, he's only added 150 new bowls on his own; area artists and students created another 100 or so more.

After guests buy a ticket to the event, they choose a bowl from an assortment of about 1000 which they can take home. The bowl, dinner, drinks, and entertainment are included in the ticket price.

“The collection of bowls really reflects the variety of sources for these bowls, literally from artists all over Kansas City,” he said. “[Steven Hill](#) is my star,” he said of the internationally known artist who is credited with starting the Empty Bowls here in Kansas City and continues to support the event each year.

Grubbs, a self-employed technical project manager with a computer engineering background, has been a ceramic artist for nearly 10 years. He sees Empty Bowls not only as a way to make a positive contribution to his community but also as a great way to raise awareness of Harvesters and of other local artists. The event coincides with the Crossroads' Arts District First Friday activities in November.

Empty Bowls is a worldwide project aimed at feeding hungry people one region at a time. The movement was conceived by what later became the Imagine Render Group in Michigan in 1990. Local potters get together and make the bowls then donate them to support the local food pantry. The long-term objective is to eliminate food insecurity (not knowing where your next meal is coming from).

John Hartom, one of the group's founders, said by email that they “planned the event as a one-time-only luncheon, not knowing that it would be such a powerful experience. It was only after the event that we decided to create a project to share.”

Empty Bowls fundraisers in various cities are not related to one another except in name and concept. Grubbs, a Navy veteran, had been involved in Empty Bowls events in other cities — Reno, Nev.; Oklahoma City and Lee's Summit — but he wanted to bring the concept to Kansas City.

Early on, he asked the arts community and a few schools to create and donate food-safe ceramic and pottery bowls — hundreds of them. He's built on that ever since.

“Each year we raise more money and get more coverage. I'm really impressed with the response,” he said.

Red Star Studios, KC Clay Guild, Flint Hills Clay Works, Kansas City Art Institute, Piper High School, and Maple Park Middle School stepped up early on. Now, school groups just show up each year with donations both at the event and at [designated locations](#) around town.

Some of the organizations donated clay, some donated bowls, some donated art for auction. The students volunteered many hours to create and glaze bowls.

“It’s just amazing to me that there’s so much willingness to contribute to a cause that helps feed the hungry,” Grubbs said.

This year, several area businesses, including [Michael Smith](#), [Price Chopper](#), and [BB’s Lawnside BBQ](#), agreed to donate food. [Boulevard Brewing Co.](#) and [Kansas City Bier Co.](#) will donate beer.

“Kansas City has a heart of gold. I am just absolutely amazed with the people that come together who are willing to give so much for all of this,” Grubbs said. “I’m just completely overwhelmed. It brings tears to my eyes to see the generosity.”

According to the [Harvesters](#) website, in its 26-county service area, one in seven people is food insecure—that’s a total of 252,380 people. Jackson County, Missouri, and Johnson County, Kansas, have the highest number of food insecure residents for the area.

“The Kansas City Empty Bowls event serves as a reminder of all the empty bowls in our community and around the world,” Grubbs wrote on the event website.

Empty Bowls KC raised approximately \$2,500 to Harvesters in other years. Grubbs hopes to double that in 2018.

***Empty Bowls takes place at Arts Tech from 6-9 p.m. Friday, November 2 at 1522 Holmes, Kansas City, Missouri 64108. [Tickets](#) are \$25 in advance or \$30 at the door.***

*Written for Empty Bowls by Kansas City freelance writer, [Anne Kniggendorf](#).*