

PARTY



**Rent
Party
for HomeFront:**

**Party with
a
Purpose**



**THROW A RENT PARTY FOR HOMEFRONT:
A PARTY WITH A PURPOSE**

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The Homeless Crisis in Mercer County

Why Families are Homeless:

On any given day in Mercer County, hundreds of families are homeless because they cannot afford the exorbitant cost of housing in our area. Most of them are working full time jobs.

The minimum wage in New Jersey is \$8.44/hour. The average cost of a two-bedroom apartment in Mercer County is \$1200.

An employee earning \$11/hour, working 40 hours a week, takes home only \$1425 a month. With rent costing over \$1200, a family is left with \$225/month to buy food, clothing, gas, and other necessities.

Because of the high cost of housing, working poor families are always struggling to make ends meet. If a crisis occurs, the precarious balance of stability is upset. The family falls behind in rent, they are evicted, and they become homeless.

The "Grub Stake" Challenge:

With HomeFront's help, many families do eventually manage to find an affordable apartment. Their salaries, though meager, will suffice to pay the monthly rent. Almost all landlords, however, require payment of the first month's rent and a security deposit to reserve an apartment. This sum, called the "Grub Stake" usually amounts to \$1000-\$1500.

Working poor families live paycheck to paycheck. All their money goes towards paying the bills every month and most have no way of providing that initial "Grub Stake."

How HomeFront Helps:

HomeFront gives qualified, working families the "Grub Stake" they need to move into their new apartment.

When HomeFront establishes that a family has found a suitable apartment, and will be able to maintain a home, we stake them the money they need to move in.

With this program, HomeFront helps hundreds of families move out of homelessness and into safe, affordable homes. It's our most popular and most sought-after program of assistance.

Challenges of Funding:

HomeFront interviews hundreds of families each year who need funding in order to secure an apartment. We simply do not have the money to stake all our families.

HomeFront relies on donations from individuals, corporations and community groups to fund this program.

How You Can Help:

THROW A PARTY WITH A PURPOSE!



A Rent Party is a great way to raise awareness of the homelessness crisis in Mercer County and make it possible for a needy family to move into their own home. It's also a meaningful community service project that all members of your group will enjoy.

What is a Rent Party?

In the 1920s and 30s, residents of Harlem raised money to pay their rent by throwing rent parties. They cooked tons of food, asked local musicians to play music, and brought out whiskey, beer, and a few card tables. While the guests were dancing and eating, the host "passed the hat," and his friends donated money to help them pay the rent.

Rent parties became incredibly popular. Eating and dancing with friends at home was cheaper than going to a local club, and folks knew they were helping a neighbor by attending.

A culture evolved from these weekly rent parties. "Rent Party Music" became popular. Southern Soul Food became the standard rent party fare. A typical menu consisted of fried chicken and fish, pigs' feet, collard greens, biscuits, and sweet potato pie.

Rent parties remained a staple element of Harlem culture until after World War II. They are recalled fondly as a symbol of community and people's willingness to help a neighbor in need.

Rent Parties: A More Detailed History

During the early 1920s, more than 200,000 black Americans migrated to Harlem. Most came from the cotton fields and plantations of the Deep South. They ventured north in the hopes of finding jobs, acceptance, and prosperity. Many succeeded, but not without an incredible amount of perseverance and struggle.

Due to the segregation laws in the North at the time, blacks congregated in small neighborhoods, often living with as many as 7,000 people in a single block. Living conditions were poor. Frequently, three to four families occupied space intended for only one. Living rooms, kitchens, and bathrooms became bedrooms, and adults slept in shifts, resting for a few hours until another body took his or her turn.

Despite the substandard quality of Harlem apartments, rents were extremely high. Apartments and furnished rooms, however dingy, were in great demand. Residents had no choice but to pay the exorbitant rents in Harlem - they had nowhere else to go.

Paying these doubled and often tripled rents wasn't easy; in fact, most Harlemites, even those with full-time jobs, found it nearly impossible. Families became incredibly innovative in finding ways to make ends meet. They composed new forms of music and played in local clubs, distilled gin in their bathtubs, and they threw rent parties.

The rent party phenomenon became an integral element in the culture of urban black America. It spread from Harlem to other cities with growing African-American populations - Chicago, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and Detroit. With the growth of rent party popularity came a flourishing of other forms of African-American culture such as music, primarily jazz, dance, poetry, and fiction. Rent parties arose at a turning point in black American history - for the first time, black social traditions were becoming a recognizable form of mainstream American culture.

How 1930s Rent Parties Relate to Today's Community and Your Group:

The circumstances contributing to the Rent Party phenomenon in 1930s Harlem- high rents, low wages, overcrowding, and substandard housing - are remarkably similar to the characteristics that cause many families living in Trenton to become homeless today.

Just like in Harlem over 70 years ago, apartments in Mercer County are scarce and extremely expensive. Families share housing with relatives and friends; children live with their parents until middle-age, long after they have started families of their own. In addition, due to the dearth of livable apartments, many people settle for housing that is inadequate. Apartments that are affordable are often dirty, cramped, and infested. Decent apartments are far too expensive for the working poor.

HomeFront helps working poor people in the Trenton area find and obtain housing. We find affordable apartments for families and give them the "Grub Stake" they need to move in. But our resources are limited. We can't do it alone.

You can help us move a homeless family into a new home by having a "Rent Party" fundraiser. Hold a party, invite your friends and family, and send the proceeds to HomeFront. We will use that money to put a down payment on a new apartment for a needy family.

Your Money Put to Great Use: The amount of money it takes to make a difference in the life of a Homeless Family

\$3000	The Grub Stake for two homeless families with children
\$1500	Moves one family into a new home
\$900	One month's rent for an average apartment in Trenton
\$500	Feed a hungry family for six weeks
\$100	A month's supply of diapers

A FEW MORE REASONS TO THROW A RENT PARTY...

- It's Fun.
- You get to have a great time and help the homeless
- Rent Parties are thematic by nature, which will automatically make your party unique:
 - Play "Rent Party" Music
 - Eat Southern Food typical of the original rent parties
 - Ask the guests to dress in 1920s or 1930s style
 - Decorate the room in a 20s or 30s theme
- Dance!
- Get community service hours or credits for having a party!
- Rent Parties can be adapted to the specific needs and qualifications of your group:
 - Junior High School Students, High School Students, College Groups, Fraternities and Sororities, Churches and Synagogues, Businesses, Clubs ... anyone can hold a rent party
- Rent Parties have a historical and cultural context
 - Educate participants about an important era in American History and also explain why rent parties are still a necessity today
 - Talk about how the high rents today in Mercer County are in many ways similar to the high rents 80 years ago in Harlem
- Rent Parties Represent Community Spirit
 - In the 1920s and 30s in order to raise money for rent, the whole community came together and celebrated in order to help a neighbor
 - Your group is doing the same - banding together to help less fortunate members of your community overcome hardship
- Everyone in your group can get involved
 - Assign one person to coordinate music, another to make invites, another to cook food, and another to do the shopping - Everyone will work together to make this happen!
- Be creative!

DETAILS ... if you need them: HOW TO PREPARE FOR YOUR RENT PARTY

1. Create a list of the things that need to be done and a list of specific items that you need. Include everything.
2. Hold a meeting/planning session with the members of your group. Give each member a copy of the "To Do List" and the "Items needed" list.
 - Have a general brainstorming session. Add and subtract items from the two lists as needed.
 - Determine key details of the party. Ask yourself the following questions:
 - Location:** Where is the party going to be held? How much space do you need? Is there enough room to dance? How many people can the area hold? Is there parking? Is there a rental cost involved? Is there ventilation? Are there neighbors?
 - Attendees:** Is the party invite only or open to anyone? If it is invite only, how many people do you plan to invite? RSVP or not? If it is open to anyone, how are you going to publicize?
 - Money:** How much money would you ideally like to raise for HomeFront? How big is your initial budget? How much do you have to charge your guests in order to meet your fundraising goal? Do you want to charge guests at the door for an all-inclusive entrance fee, or will admission be free and drinks and food bought instead? Would you rather sell tickets at the door - with prices of food listed in number of tickets?
 - Theme:** Work out the details. It's going to be a rent party - but how realistic do you want to make it? Are you only going to play 20s and 30s or "Rent Party" music? Do people have to dress in clothing from that era? Are you going to serve traditional "Rent Party" food?
 - Food:** If you decide to serve traditional "Rent Party" food, which is typical southern soul food - who's going to make it?
 - We encourage you to make your own. On pages 12-15 we have included a sample menu and several pages of recipes - provided by members of the HomeFront staff themselves. These recipes are tried and true, so we know they're excellent.
 - Southern food will add a real air of authenticity to your party. But if you'd rather serve simple modern-day party food instead, that's fine. Just make sure you know who's in charge of bringing, buying, or making the food and who's in charge of setting it up the night of the party.
 - Music:** Any good rent party has to have music. In this area, you have several options:
 - You could hire a DJ and have him play the usual dance music. But this costs money - so keep in mind that you'll have to charge more at the door to make a profit.
 - You could have a member of your group DJ. We suggest playing a lot of traditional rent party music. A whole genre of music was created specifically for rent parties

- so you have a lot to choose from. Any jazz or early guitar music will do. To help you make the music authentic, we have made a number of CDs of traditional rent party music. Play these and have a ball.

- You could hire a band - a jazz or blues band if you want traditional rent party music, or any other band you think people will like. HomeFront can make some recommendations. But again, remember, this costs money, so if you want to keep admission prices down, having a group member DJ might be a more efficient option.

-Mission: Even though you're having a party, which by nature is care free and fun, don't let your guests forget WHY you're having the party. You are raising money for homeless families who cannot afford the extremely high rents in Mercer County. Have information about HomeFront at the party. If you want a representative from HomeFront to say a few words, we'll be happy to send one over.

Make sure your group is educated about homelessness and about Mercer County's housing crisis. And ensure that your guests know that they are DOING SOMETHING to help people. They're not just having a good time; they're making a difference.

3. Before you adjourn, delegate each member of your organization to take charge of a certain task. Make sure everyone has something to do.

Have a person in charge of each of the following categories:

Food, Invitations, Flyers, Supplies, Music, Set-Up, Clean-Up, Door/Party Staff, Photography, Accounting/Budget, HomeFront Contact, PR/Media, etc.

SAMPLE RENT PARTY MENU

(RECIPES PROVIDED ON FOLLOWING PAGE)

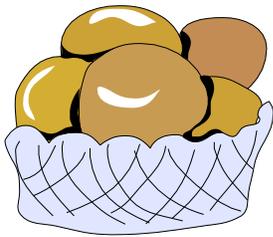
MAIN DISHES

FRIED CHICKEN
FRIED FISH
GLAZED HAM
MACARONI AND CHEESE



SIDE DISHES

BISCUITS
CORN BREAD
POTATO SALAD
COLLARD GREENS
STRING BEANS
BAKED BEANS



DESSERTS



SWEET POTATO PIE
COCONUT CUSTARD PIE
PEACH COBBLER

BEVERAGES

FRUIT PUNCH
SODA
COFFEE
(BEER)



RENT PARTY RECIPES

WRITTEN AND COMPILED BY THE HOMEFRONT STAFF

MARY'S PEACH COBBLER

Yield: 1 (9 inch) pie, 6-8 servings

Ingredients:

- 6 large ripe peaches
- ½ cup sugar
- 1 Tablespoon lemon juice
- 2 Tablespoons flour
- 2 prepared pie crusts

Directions:

Peel and slice peaches. Mix in sugar, lemon juice, and flour. Pour mixture into a 9 by 13-inch pan. Cut pie crust to fit over peaches, using extra pieces to make designs such as leaves and stars. Sprinkle sugar over crust and bake in a preheated 350 degree oven for 30-35 minutes or until golden brown. Serve with vanilla ice cream or whipped cream
Enjoy! It's fantastic!

THE BEST BAKED BEANS

Serves approx. 20

- 6 cans Pork & Beans
- 1 can red kidney beans
- 1 can butter beans
- 1 can great northern white beans
- 1 can black beans
- 1 ½ cups brown sugar
- ¼ cup mustard
- ½ cup ketchup
- 1 large Vidalia onion, chopped
- ½ lb. bacon, cooked and cut into 1" pieces
- 1 lb. kielbasa, sliced into ½" circles and cooked

Directions: Take all the above ingredients and mix in a large roasting pan. Cook for 1 ½ hours at 350.

MAC-N-CHEESE

Serves: 8-10

- 1 Tablespoon vegetable oil
- 1 lb. elbow macaroni
- 8 T (1 stick) plus 1 T butter
- ½ cup (2 oz) shredded Muenster cheese
- ½ cup (2 oz) shredded mild Cheddar
- ½ cup (2 oz) shredded sharp Cheddar
- ½ cup (2 oz) shredded Monterey Jack
- 2 cups half-and-half
- 1 cup (8 oz) Velveeta, cut into small pieces
- 2 large eggs, slightly beaten
- ¼ tsp seasoned salt
- 1/8 tsp black pepper

Directions: Preheat oven to 350. Lightly butter a deep 2 ½ quart casserole. Bring a large pot of water to boil over high heat. Add oil, elbow macaroni, and cook 7 min. or until macaroni is just tender. Drain well. Return to pot.

In small saucepan, melt 8 Tbsp butter. Stir into the macaroni. In a large bowl, mix the Muenster, mild and sharp Cheddar, and Monterey Jack cheeses. To the macaroni, add half-and-half, 1 ½ cups of the shredded cheese, the Velveeta, and eggs. Season with salt + pepper. Transfer to the buttered casserole. Sprinkle with remaining ½ cup of shredded cheese and dot with remaining 1 Tb butter.
Bake until its bubbling around edges, about 35 min.

RENT PARTY PUNCH

Ingredients:

- 1 Qt fresh orange juice
- 32 oz. canned or fresh pineapple
- 2 cups coconut milk
- 1 liter seltzer water
- 1 pineapple, peeled and cut into 1" cubes and frozen
- 1 pint of strawberries, hulled and frozen
- 1 orange, sliced thin
- 4 cups light rum, optional

Directions:

To a large punch bowl, add orange juice, pineapple juice, coconut milk and seltzer. Mix well. Place frozen pineapple chunks and strawberries in the punch to keep it cold. Float the orange slices on top of the punch for garnish. If desired, add rum.

SIMPLY DELICIOUS STRING BEANS

Yield: 6-8 servings

Ingredients:

- 2 Tablespoons olive oil
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped
- 1 garlic clove, finely chopped
- 1 lb. string beans, trimmed, cut into 2" lengths
- Seasoned salt
- Freshly ground pepper

Directions:

In a large nonstick skillet, heat the oil over medium heat. Add the onion and garlic and cook until softened, about 3 minutes. Add the string beans and cover. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the green beans are crisp-tender, about 6 minutes. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Serve hot.

"C'MON TRY 'EM" COLLARD GREENS

Yield: 6-8 servings

Ingredients:

- ½ lb. smoked meat (ham hocks, smoked turkey wings, or smoked neck bones)
- 1 Tbs. House seasoning (recipe below)
- 1 Tbs. Seasoned salt
- 1 Tbs. Hot red pepper sauce
- 1 large bunch collard greens
- 1 Tbs. Butter

House Seasoning

- 1 cup salt
- ¼ cup black pepper
- ¼ cup garlic powder

Mix above together and store for up to 6 months.

Directions:

In a large pot, bring 3 quarts of water to a boil and add smoked meat, house seasoning, seasoned salt and hot sauce. Reduce heat to medium and cook for 1 hour.

Wash collard greens thoroughly. Remove stems that run down center by holding the leaf in your left hand and stripping the leaf down with your right hand. The tender young leaves in the heart of the collards don't need to be stripped. Stack 6-8 leaves on top of one another, roll up, and slice into ½" to 1" thick slices. Place greens in pot with meat and add butter. Cook for 45-60 minutes, stirring occasionally.

LESTER'S SWEET POTATO PIE

Yield: two pies

Ingredients:

- 5 medium size sweet potatoes
- ¾ cup (1 ½ sticks) margarine, melted
- 2 Tbsp. brown sugar
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 tsp. vanilla extract
- 1 tsp. ground Nutmeg
- 3 large eggs
- 2 prepared pie crusts

Directions:

Boil sweet potatoes in large pot until soft to touch (approx. 35 min.). Remove potatoes and peel.

Place potatoes in large bowl and blend on medium until smooth. Slowly add the rest of the ingredients while blending. When all ingredients have been added, blend for another 1-2 minutes (do not over beat).

***Before adding mixture to crusts, you may want to add more sugar, butter, or vanilla according to taste. Pie will taste exactly the same when it comes out of the oven as when it goes in.

Bake crusts in oven for approx. 5 min. at 425 degrees before putting in mixture. Remove crusts from oven. Pour mixture evenly into crusts. Bake at 425 degrees for 1 hour.

"CAN'T GET ENOUGH" CORN BREAD

Ingredients:

- 2 cups flour
- ¼ cup sugar
- 2 eggs, slightly beaten
- ¾ cup milk
- ½ tsp baking soda
- 3 tbsp melted shortening

Directions:

In a large bowl, combine all ingredients. Stir well. Batter may not be completely smooth.

Butter 8 x 8 pan. Spread mixture evenly into pan.

Bake at 400 degrees for 20-25 minutes.

BRENDA'S FAMOUS FRIED CHICKEN

Ingredients:

- 1 whole chicken, cut into 4-5 pieces
- Lawery's seasoned salt
- Pepper (adobe?)
- Paprika
- 2 cups Aunt Jemima flour
- 2 cups oil

Directions:

Cut up whole chicken. Wash and place on paper towel to dry. Season chicken pieces lightly with seasoned salt, pepper, and paprika.

Place two cups flour in plastic bag. Place chicken pieces inside and shake until pieces are covered with flour.

In deep cast iron skilled pour oil. Heat until hot on medium heat. Place pieces of chicken into skillet. Leave space between chicken pieces – DO NOT touch pieces together.

Fry until light brown then turn. Turn again 2 times or until skin is golden brown.

Place on paper towel to drain.

“LET’S PARTY” POTATO SALAD

Ingredients:

- 1 Lb. potatoes
- 1 Cup Hellman’s Mayonaisse
- 5-6 Tbsp. Sweet Relish
- 1 Whole Onion, peeled and chopped into very fine pieces
- 1 tsp. mustard
- ½ tsp. pepper
- ½ tsp. salt
- 5 hard boiled eggs, cut into small pieces

Directions:

Peel and cut potatoes into ½ inch squares. Wash in cold water. In a large pot, boil ten cups of water. Place potatoes in water and cook for 15 minutes or until semi-soft. Drain and rinse potatoes with cold water. Place potatoes in large bowl and combine all remaining ingredients. Add more mayonaisse or other seasonings to taste if desired.

BUTTERMILK BISCUITS

Ingredients:

- 3 cups flour (preferably Aunt Jemima, found at Shop-Rite or Pathmark)
- ½ cup Crisco
- 2 cups buttermilk

Directions:

Combine all ingredients into a large bowl. Mix well. Pour batter onto a towel. Roll dough with a rolling pin, adding 1 additional cup of flour to dough to prevent sticking. Pull off hockey-puck size pieces of dough. Roll and pat half-flat. Place into round or square baking pan or cookie sheet for 25 minutes or until golden brown. Remove from oven and rub tops with butter or margarine. Cover with a towel and serve hot.

FABULOUS FRIED FISH

Ingredients:

- 1 lb. white fish (perch, bass, trout, or catfish)
- Seasoned Salt
- Adobe with pepper seasoning
- 1 Cup yellow corn meal
- 1 Cup oil

Directions:

Wash fish and put on paper towel to dry. Lightly sprinkle fish with seasoned salt and adobe with pepper. Pour 1 cup corn meal into plastic freezer size bag. Place fish inside and shake well to coat.

In cast iron skillet, heat oil. Place fish in skilled and fry on medium heat for 3 minutes or until firm. Turn fish over and fry additional 3 minutes, or until done. Place fish on paper towel to drain excess grease. Serve fish with hot sauce, ketchup, mustard, or tartar sauce.

MY GROUP IS THROWING A RENT PARTY! REGISTRATION FORM

Name of Organization/Group _____

Contact Person _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Fax _____

Email _____

Description of Organization/Group (school group, community group, ages of members, number of members, mission statement, etc.)

Details of Party:

Where _____

When (time/date) _____

Invite only or open to public? _____

Any other pertinent party info _____

Please send or fax this form to HomeFront, c/o Meghan Cubano,
1880 Princeton Avenue, Lawrenceville, NJ 08648
Fax: (609) 989-9423, Phone: (609) 989-9417

ABOUT HOMEFRONT: Helping Mercer County's Homeless Families

Our Mission ... is to end homelessness in Mercer County by harnessing the caring and resources of the community. We are committed to lessening the immediate pain of homelessness and to helping families become self-sufficient. We work to give families skills and opportunities to ensure adequate incomes and to increase the availability of adequate affordable housing.

Our resources ... are student groups, church and synagogue groups, and our friends and neighbors who donate meals, clothing, and furniture for homeless families. Many caring individuals, foundations and corporations provide the financial support that allows us to provide programs in life and employment readiness skills to adults as well as educational and enrichment programs for their school age children.

Our efforts ... helped homeless and working poor families last year by providing: 10,054 nights of emergency shelter; 72,264 meals to homeless families; day care for 30 children; enrichment programs for 523 school age children; furniture for 516 apartment; living wage jobs for 62 parents; apartments for 349 families and much more.

Our concern ... is that the need for shelter and food is spiraling out of control. HomeFront received a record number of requests for aid this year - not just from homeless families, but also from the working poor. A mother, receiving a working class salary in Mercer County, often cannot stretch it to cover rent, food, utilities, day care, health care and transportation. One of the biggest challenges of society today is to break the cycle of poverty.

Your help ... is crucial to our success - as an agency, as a community. Please contact us to learn more about how you, your company, or your organization can help.



1880 Princeton Avenue
Lawrenceville, NJ 08648
(609) 989-9417
www.homefrontnj.org