

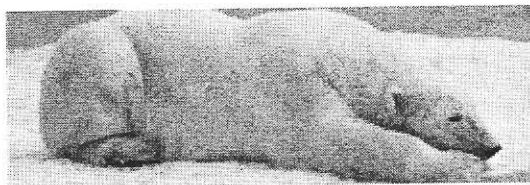


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Laura Sperling  
**STRONG WOMEN, GOOD FOOD, HOPEFUL SIGNS**  
**Nourishing hope at Janie Poe**

When I arrived at the give-thanks dinner last Tuesday at Janie Poe public housing complex, I planned to listen, not eat.

But before long there was a plate in my hand, and it quickly filled with slow-cooked greens, savory rice, juicy turkey, corn pudding, mashed potatoes and gravy and sweet yams. Who could resist?

The homemade feast was hosted by two women: Valerie Buchand and Jackie Green, both residents and leaders of north Sarasota's low-income "projects."

The 30 or so folks at the table shared a common thread: They had been involved, in some fashion, in the long quest to improve life at Janie Poe.

It is the most infamous, though not the oldest, of the city's public housing. For years, news articles and later a documentary evoked residents' frustration with its leaky plumbing, bug and mold problems, backlogged repairs and general dilapidation.

Worse than the physical conditions, perhaps, was the stifling sense of community failure as one after another revitalization plan collapsed, due to lack of funds. The housing authority and local governments tried hard but couldn't pull together the strength, know-how or clout to meet the difficult requirements of a new era. The feds, essentially in charge of policy and funding, were no help either at the time.

When I'd see her at various housing authority meetings back then, Buchand was an angry, untrusting woman who'd had it up to here with

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