

Art Meets Service at Bowl-A-Thon

The ceramics studio at Lee College buzzed with creativity, conversation, and community spirit during a recent Bowl-a-Thon benefiting Empty Bowls Houston. With nearly 50 participants from both the college and the surrounding community, the event brought together students, alumni, and neighbors for an afternoon rooted in service, connection, and a shared purpose.

The Bowl-a-Thon supports Empty Bowls, an international grassroots initiative focused on raising awareness and funds to combat hunger. In Houston, the annual Empty Bowls event benefits the Houston Food Bank, with 100 percent of proceeds supporting efforts to fight food insecurity across the region. Attendees at the fundraiser select handcrafted bowls donated by local ceramists and craft artists, each offered in exchange for a \$25 donation.

For many participants, the Bowl-a-Thon offered a first introduction to ceramics and a meaningful way to give back at the same time. The hands-on experience allowed newcomers to shape clay into bowls that will later be used at the Empty Bowls Houston event, transforming art-making into an act of generosity.

That sense of welcome and community resonated with first-time continuing education student Sylvia Gomez, who brought her friend and sister to the Bowl-a-Thon to try pottery making for the first time.

“They both enjoyed it immensely and are now planning to enroll next semester,” Gomez said. “The Bowl-a-Thon was a great experience, especially because they found ceramics to be very therapeutic.”

Gomez’s experience reflects a broader theme of the event: bringing people together through creativity while supporting a cause larger than themselves. Throughout the afternoon, participants worked side by side, sharing techniques, stories, and laughter as they shaped bowls destined for a charitable purpose.

For nearly 20 years, Lee College’s ceramics department has played an active role in supporting Empty Bowls by donating handmade bowls annually to the Houston event. The Bowl-a-Thon serves as a key part of that tradition, expanding the effort beyond enrolled students to include the entire community.

After the event concludes, ceramics students take on the detailed work that follows. Each bowl is carefully cleaned, refined, glazed, and fired, transforming the raw clay forms into finished pieces. Once completed, the bowls are transported to Houston, where they will be offered to the public during the Empty Bowls fundraiser.

Jennifer Herzberg, ceramics instructor at Lee College, says the Bowl-a-Thon highlights the power of collective effort and creative service.

“The Bowl-a-Thon, in supporting Empty Bowls, is an important reminder of what can happen when a community comes together with purpose,” Herzberg said. “Our students and neighbors consistently show up with generosity and compassion, and that collective spirit makes a real impact for those facing food insecurity.”

Through events like the Bowl-a-Thon, Lee College continues to demonstrate how art, education, and community engagement can intersect in meaningful ways. By opening its studio doors to the public and inviting participation in a long-standing tradition of

service, the college reinforces the idea that small, thoughtful actions, like shaping a single bowl, can contribute to lasting change.