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Cathedral Kitchen News

40 Years and Growing!


Just as Cathedral Kitchen was about to embark on its 40th year, we received word that we were one of a select group of nonprofit organizations selected each year to receive a Neighborhood Builders Grant from Bank of America.

The award provides flexible funding over a two year period, and includes seed money for CK to acquire a food truck. Our plan is to be use the food truck in two ways: 1) to take our CK Café menu on the road for lunch to Rutgers or the City Hall area to generate income, and 2) to expand our capacity to provide meals to those in need beyond our facility and at other times of the day.

The truck we are purchasing was formerly used to address hunger issues with proceeds from truck food sales. It can also be used to offer food assistance during times of crisis, such as a natural disaster like Hurricane Sandy. With this grant from Bank of America, CK will be able to explore innovative new ways to fight hunger.

CK has teamed up with Urban Promise (UP) to provide meals to children in their after school programs. In October, we began providing a meal once a week at each of UP’s after-school locations. We are also doing a monthly meal for families who use UP’s food pantry. UP Education Coordinator Sandra Newhall commented: “The meals last night were amazing and the students all loved them... the kids even loved the salad.” Pictured is a happy student with her plate of chicken, rice and salad.

Camden’s seniors, many of whom are home-bound and on fixed incomes, are also of great concern. Last fall, we began making a weekly donation of produce and packaged food to the Riverview Apartments (pictured at top). Riverview is a subsidized senior apartment complex whose residents are loving the new program. “We are happy to be able to provide food that CK cannot use to the seniors, especially since these individuals have the ability to prepare the food, unlike many of our dinner guests. We hope to develop other partnerships as our resources grow,” states Executive Director Karen Talarico.

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After several years of scraping together funds and donated food, a program was begun at the Kitchen that was to become the heart of the operation for the next decade—the “casserole program”. It was an ingenious way to involve hundreds of people in serving the poor from their own kitchens with homemade casseroles, frozen and transported to the Kitchen by volunteers.

This program provided such an interesting and dynamic way to extend one’s own family table to the poor of Camden that it caught like wildfire and spread throughout the area, including churches of many denominations and synagogues as well. The casserole program sustained the operation through the 1980’s.
Impact That Lasts...  

In December, students of the 14th Culinary Arts Training program were joined by the first graduates of the new Baking Arts Training Program in a celebration with family, friends and CK supporters—brining CK’s total graduate count to 230! The specialized skill of baking arts has proven to be an attractive skill to employers, with many of baking graduates employed shortly after graduation.

Chef Jonathan addressed the graduates and their families, followed by culinary class valedictorian Kenny Andino (pictured with Karen Talarico). “Remember my name,” is what Kenny told his fellow graduates at the graduation ceremony, “I’ll be a famous chef one day.” An organized kitchen operative with the cooking talent to make his dreams come true, Kenny has made a believer out of his mentor, CK executive chef and culinary instructor Jonathan Jernigan. “His drive in the kitchen is unstoppable,” according to Chef. CK is so proud of Kenny and we look forward to following his accomplishments in and out of the kitchen.

Diana Ross, valedictorian for the inaugural Baking Arts Training program graduating class, is extremely focused in the kitchen when she is putting together a baking recipe. Here Diana is making cookies for CK’s Harvest for Hunger event during a hands on instructional session. A long-time resident of the Fairview section of Camden, Diana had some basic cooking skills, but she knew that she wanted to expand her culinary expertise. Upon seeing a flyer about CK’s job training programs, she completed the application process and was accepted into the baking class. “I like to learn and I love the kitchen,” Diana noted, adding, “I am thrilled to have graduated. I’m still soaking it in!” Diana was recently hired at Virtua Hospital. Congratulations!

In the 1990’s, the Kitchen was granted tax exempt status and recognition as a 501(c)(3) corporation. This allowed the Kitchen to be eligible for grants from foundations and corporations, and also to be the beneficiary of bequests and tax deductible donations by individuals.

Financial literacy training has been a core part of our culinary arts program since its inception. Four years ago CK expanded this training to include individual counseling for graduates offered by Wanda Hardy of the Financial Wellness Institute, a CK partner for many years. This program enhancement imparts personalized financial advice to our students.

Milagros Torres (pictured with Wanda Hardy), a culinary graduate, has taken full advantage of this benefit since her graduation in 2012. Desiring a better life for her two children, Milagros has worked diligently under Wanda’s guidance to eliminate debt and establish good credit.

Praising the help she got from Wanda, Milagros noted that “She kept me on point with my goal. She would call, check in with me. It wasn’t just a job for her,” she said, “and I really appreciated that. She helped me get to where I wanted to be.” Milagros is committed to teaching her children how to make important personal financial decisions so they can be successful moving into adulthood. She also has a long term goal: to own her own home. With her newly acquired financial skills, we know she can accomplish that dream, too.

1990’s

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CK took a big step by hiring its first cooking staff, Clyde and Theresa Jones, known as “Pop” and “Mom”, to serve the growing number of people coming for meals. Shortly thereafter, Sister Jean came on board and this team of three held the operation together for many years.
2001 marked CK’s 25th anniversary and the beginning of a search for a permanent home as the monthly meal number climbed over 7,000. In 2003 a decision was made to hire the organization’s first Executive Director to assist with a $1 million building renovation, which later became a new construction project expected to exceed $3 million. Late in 2005, CK secured a capacity building grant and hired its first Development Director to assist with its capital campaign.

Lots of determination and a few miracles helped the organization raise enough funds to break ground on the new building in 2007. “A Home For Cathedral Kitchen” was beginning to become a reality!

Pilgrims from Africa and Boston (above) stopped by CK to perform several joyous songs for our guests before continuing their journey to Philadelphia to see the Pope!

Our Harvest for Hunger fundraiser has become a popular annual event. Pictured above at the 2015 fundraiser are (l to r) CK COO Bea Gosik, Chris and Domenic Vallone, and Ann Miller with bid cards in hand for the live auction. This event generates 10% of the funding for our human services programs.

Friends of the St. Nicholas Mission, the Rotary Club of Camden and others in the community donated backpacks filled with school supplies for children who dine at CK’s family tables.

Holiday Express brought dinner AND the party to CK, putting our dinner guests and staff in the 2015 holiday spirit. Their live band filled the CK dining room with music, inspiring some of our guests to dance! Children were treated to face painting and every guest received a gift bag.

CK Chef Jill and her baking students prepared “Pope pretzels” and Chef Jonathan and his students made pizza for our dinner guests to honor the Pope’s visit to our area.
Members of the Philadelphia 76ers office staff volunteered to serve dinner on a recent night in the dining room. The Sixers mascot, Franklin, a blue dog with perky ears and a wagging tail, was in tow and unleashed a barrage of shenanigans that kept our little and big diners laughing.

In November of 2008, we served the first meal in our new building and reached another milestone, serving 100,000 meals that year. The kitchen in the new facility allows us to provide meals to local shelters, after school programs, and other community organizations.

In 2009, the Culinary Arts Training Program was launched to provide basic culinary training and job placement assistance to 40 people per year. The program is taught by CK Chef Jonathan, with more than 20 guest chefs from local restaurants teaching segments in their specialties.

Volunteers scrubbed down the dining room in the morning and others dropped off thousands of sandwiches, utensil packs and decorated place mats throughout Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. During the meal service, podiatrist Dr. John Gentless and healthcare professionals from Rutgers School of Nursing and the School of Public Health, Our Lady of Lourdes Wellness Center provided health screenings, massages and offered critical health information to our guests. It was a great day of service at the Kitchen!

Avalon Flooring held a corporate team building day at the Kitchen. They followed a team meeting in the dining room with a scrumptious lunch from the CK Café. In the afternoon, Avalon staff worked in various volunteer assignments, including washing dishes, chopping vegetables in the kitchen and making peanut butter and jelly sandwiches.

Executive Chef Jonathan Jernigan presented an "Invest in Your Health/Healthy Food Demonstration" at Cousin's Supermarket in Camden. A tasting of nutritious, delicious and easy to make meals, prepared and served by CK graduates Kenny Andino and Jamell Sewell, were sampled by participating families.
In Memoriam

CK staff and students were shocked and saddened to hear that Chef Richard Reiss had passed away on January 14th. Chef Richard taught in our Culinary Arts Training program since the first session in 2009, and was greatly loved by the many students he taught and by the staff, volunteers and supporters of the Kitchen. He was a great teacher, cook and person, with a quick sense of humor and a very caring heart. He will truly be missed.

Happy Birthday, Pop!

Clyde “Pop” Jones and Teresa “Mom” Jones, pictured with Chef Jonathan, were the first cooks hired at CK in the early 1990’s. They retired in 2009 and Pop celebrated his 90th birthday this past January at a surprise party catered by CK!

Volunteer Farmers Wanted!

Once again, Cathedral Kitchen will be partnering with the New Jersey Agricultural Society’s Farmers Against Hunger to ensure surplus produce will go to help those in need. Pictured above are Campbell Soup volunteers harvesting butternut squash last season.

If you would like to pick produce and bring it back to CK, visit the Farmers’ website’s volunteer page to register to receive information about picking dates: www.njagsociety.org/volunteer-connect.html See FAQ’s on their website for guidelines.

For additional information about the partnership, contact Alexandra Wills: alex@cathedralkitchen.org.

Fast Facts:
CK Dinner Guest Demographics
77% Male; 23 % Female
80% Minority
12% Children
21% Age 60+
26% Homeless
36% In Tenuous Housing

In 2009 CK established partnerships with other organizations to provide supplemental services to our dinner guests and culinary students. This strategy allowed CK to maximize the use of space with minimal cost to CK.

In 2010 local dentists and dental professionals began volunteering two days per week in the CK Project Smiles dental clinic.

The new facility at 1514 Federal Street became a testament to the vision of CK’s founders and will provide new and expanded ways to serve impoverished residents of Camden.
A Social Enterprise Emerges!

Cathedral Kitchen’s social enterprise is a mission-driven business that increases CK’s ability to sustain itself while also breaking down barriers to employment in the Camden area. CK has created jobs in its commercial kitchen, catering business and its CK Café. CK leadership believes that job placement, fed by CK’s job training program graduates and Camden residents, can be transformational for individuals, families and the community.

REDF (redf.org) is an organization that facilitates investment in social enterprises that grow jobs and work to solve social problems. Research reported by REDF shows that for every dollar social enterprises spend they return $2.23 to society, including $1.31 to taxpayers from reduction in government benefits and increases in revenues.

REDF finds five drivers of impact among the many enterprises they have studied:

ANCHORS—Large customers that purchase goods and services. CK is fortunate to have a partnership with Volunteers of America Delaware Valley (VOADV) as its primary customer for contract meals. The idea began as a pilot in 2012 that allowed CK to evaluate the potential for future growth.

AUDACITY—Expansive leadership and unconventional thinking in the development of market-based solutions to intractable social problems. Many said CK’s vision would never be realized!

EVIDENCE—Performance measurement that informs management practices. Specifically, CK Board of Directors and management have engaged in an analysis of year one financial and social impact results. The enterprise is self-funding, contributes to CK human services programs and employs eleven graduates and four Camden residents.

GROWTH CAPITAL—Funding that builds the capacity for business expansion. CK’s capital campaign to build the facility that houses our social enterprise was supported by foundations, corporations and individuals. The facility, combined with the VOADV’s commitment, made the expansion possible.

IDENTITY—Brand, culture and operational practices make a social enterprise distinctive. CK’s 40-year history has created a unique identity in the southern New Jersey landscape. The CK Café trumpets CK’s support for the Camden community.

The contract meal program launched in December 2014, with the formal dedication of the new facility in April 2015 and the opening of the CK Café in May. CK’s new Baking Arts Training Program, launched in August, increasing CK’s capacity to train more people and guide them on their path toward self-sufficiency.
Dear Friends,

I can hardly believe so many years have passed since I first came to CK in 2003. I remember being shown my desk on a raised platform in the old Camden Catholic gym, with no computer or phone in sight. And then there was the locker room office with the filing cabinets in the shower stalls, hard to decide which was better!

I was hired to raise a million dollars to rehab a building CK had purchased, which very quickly became a building project of over four million dollars at our current site. It took five years from that first day to open the doors at 1514 Federal Street.

Over the past 13 years, it has been such a wonderful experience to work with so many people who share my passion for the work of the Kitchen, and have helped the Kitchen to grow and offer new programs and services. Our first building project was transformative and has such a positive effect on so many lives: from those who have graduated from our job training programs, to those who now have a nice smile because they have had dental work in our clinic.

Our second building project was equally life changing for those who were hired to fill the 15 jobs created in the social enterprise programs housed at 1506 Federal Street. We have even had the opportunity to improve the landscape of the city of Camden, where we have operated for all of those 40 years, by opening our restaurant to serve the people who live and work here.

It has been a privilege to be a part of this amazing journey, and I am looking forward to guiding the Kitchen to find new ways to improve the lives of those in need in the years to come.

Karen Talarico
Executive Director