

THE OPEN DOOR

FROM THE CORE COMMUNITY OF ANDRÉ HOUSE

FALL 2021

WELCOME BACK



THE FIRST TIME IN A LONG TIME

JULIA BLOIS ANDRÉ HOUSE GUEST NAVIGATOR AND CORE RECRUITER

Balloons were tied to the new chairs, bleach water buckets were staged, and volunteers assumed their positions, wearing fresh blue aprons. The air conditioners and ice machine hummed. I sat perched on the “back gate” stool – my favorite seat at André House – for the first time in a year and a half. Opening the rear door at 5:30 on the dot, I said goodnight to the first guest to leave the dining room: 18 months of quiet. The last of it whispered out into the warm valley night as the rumble of excited diners approached.

First in line was Hunter, just as he always was. I smiled as I watched him say an eager yes to each item on the line and make a beeline to his old favorite seat.

“Was it always this bright in here?”

Taurus came through the line early on, too. He slowly melted into his chair, closed his eyes, and held his head in his hands, leaning over the heaping tray. Maybe saying grace, maybe just appreciating a moment of rest and cool air – a prayer either way. He picked up his hard-boiled egg. He softly tapped either end on the table and then rolled it so that the shell cracked all over, dwarfed by the size of his hands. He peeled with a rare, tempered gentleness, settling into this pocket of time not spent waiting or rushing or just pushing through.

“Is anyone sitting here?” another man asked at the next table over. “No sir,” said Michael, extending a hand and an introduction. The pair exchanged a firm shake and spoke for the rest of the hour about growing up in the Midwest, looking for work, football, and the different ways their mothers taught them to peel eggs, all while slowly draining their iced blue Powerades.

The familiar buzz became palpable as seats filled in and as friends reconnected and regulars showed new folks the way things are done.

“Sounds crazy, but it just feels good to rest my elbows on a table. I can’t remember the last time I ate at a table!”

Strangers watched each other’s belongings as they took turns washing up at the sinks. Some folks took a few bites and sips and then rested their eyes for a while, a much-needed respite.

“The AC and feeling like I’m really sharing a meal with friends is the best, but I think I missed the salt and pepper shakers most! I used to put red pepper flakes on everything. Would’ve been hard to keep track of those outside. God, I can’t believe how long it’s been.”

Marlow moved the piano bench to under the crucifix, sat, looked around, and just laughed. Making music in his own right.

For 18 months, the “open door” had to be mostly closed. So the loading dock entrance became our portal. The “family dinner” energy turned into that of a block party, and love and hope was mixed into every tray even when it was almost too hot to stomach anything at all. These days and nights took their toll, testing our guests - body and soul.

“I was glad to be eating, but once summer came around again... I was starting to feel like a dog in the street.”

Gina took a balloon for her boyfriend’s birthday. Rita came through the line again in the last two minutes, just for “as many blackberries as possible.” The sounds of trays being whacked slowed as the sun set.

“What do you think?” I asked James as he perused the library shelves to my left, undoubtedly looking for a mystery he hadn’t read yet. He shook his head at me, as if to say, “You have no idea.” He chose a novel. “You know, out here it can start to feel like all change is bad. This is the first time in a long time that I get to go back to something I’ve been missing. And that means the world.”





"It is great to see all our guests again as well as the faces of all the volunteers. It has been 18 months. We are all a family. It is wonderful to be reunited."



"I'm so excited and pleased to be here. It makes my heart happy!"

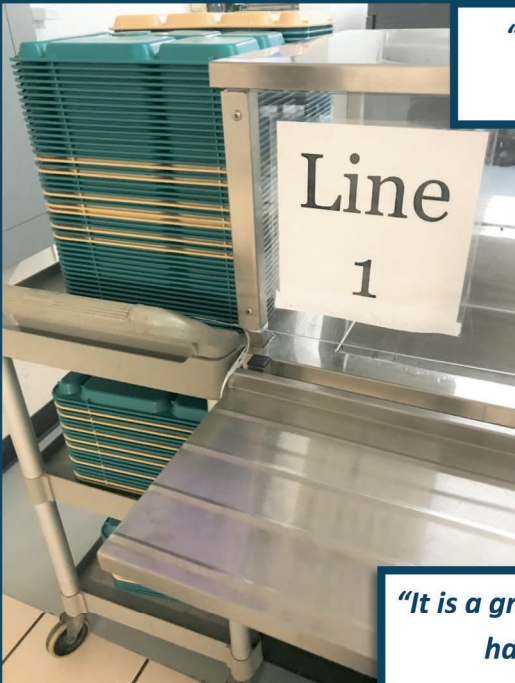


"It is very emotional to be back in service"



"I love the people who are here working. They have a heart for serving. I am blessed to be a part of it."

"It is emotional. For our guests to be able to come in off the street and eat in the dining room again is fantastic!"



"It is a great community when everyone gets to sit together in the dining room. We have an opportunity to hear our guests stories. Everyone has a story."



"I am not sure who is blessed more, our guests or myself.."



"We have lost the time, but we are right back where we were in spirit, heart and service. We haven't missed a step."



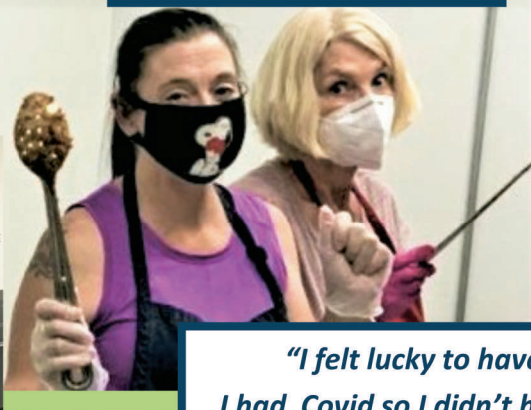
ANDRÉ HOUSE IS GRATEFUL TO ALL OUR VOLUNTEERS WHO WERE ABLE TO BE PRESENT DURING THE LAST YEAR. YOU INFUSED OUR LIVES WITH STRENGTH AND HOPE. WE GIVE THANKS TO ALL WHO KEPT US IN YOUR PRAYERS AND SUPPORTED US WITH LOVE.



"Every week our guests would ask me, When are we going to go back inside? As the day got closer, they couldn't wait!"



"I was honored to be able to be here and to be able to keep providing dinner to people who wouldn't have had dinner otherwise. It means a lot."



"I felt lucky to have been able to be here. I had Covid so I didn't have to fear it. I felt blessed to be able to help out."



"I'm thankful for the people who were able to be here when so many of us couldn't be..."

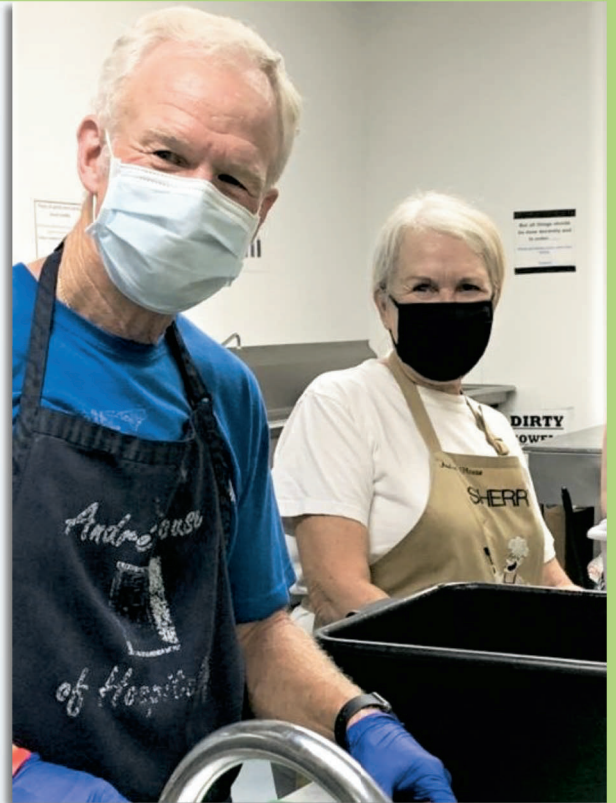
2021 SPIRIT OF HOLY CROSS AWARD RECIPIENTS

KEN AND SHERRY SWENSON

The Congregation of Holy Cross, United States Province of Priests and Brothers, announced thirteen Spirit of Holy Cross Awards honorees for 2021. The awards are given annually to lay collaborators who faithfully serve the Province in the United States and abroad. The Spirit of Holy Cross Award acknowledges the critical importance lay collaborators play in living out the vision and mission of Holy Cross founder Blessed Basil Moreau - to make God known, loved and served, through education, parish and mission settings.

"We do not imagine that those who commit themselves in other ways to the following of Jesus are thereby hindered in their service of neighbor. On the contrary, we find in them willing and complementary partners in a shared mission. We want our vows, faithfully lived, to be a witness and call to them as their commitments, faithfully lived, are witness and call to us." (Constitutions of the Congregation of Holy Cross, 5:44)

Ken and Sherry Swenson have risen to the commitment of constant support and encouragement for the staff and guests experiencing homelessness at the André House in Phoenix, Arizona. Their involvement began in 2000 when their son was a volunteer as part of his high school service commitment. They were humbled by the needs of those experiencing homelessness and dedicated their time, energy, and hearts to the Monday Night Evening Meal Service. This began their weekly commitment to helping prepare and serve 600 plus meals to guests experiencing homelessness. They provide a welcoming and joyful spirit in the building of the Monday Night volunteer team. The couple's support and mentoring of the young adult Core members as they work through their André House year of service has had a lasting impact on these individuals. When COVID forced André House to let go of their volunteers, the Swenson's persisted. They found ways to engage others in the community to assist André House through donations of food, clothing, and funds. They organized groups of friends to sponsor purchasing meals for 600 people a night to help relieve the pressure on our unassisted André House staff. Most importantly, they were there for André House in a time of great uncertainty. When André House was able to engage a small number of volunteers, the Swenson's were the first to come back. They added an extra day to their already engaged Monday prep shifts. Soon Ken Swenson became the cook on Thursdays. Throughout this pandemic, they have always been supplying support, hope, and taking away any fears. As a businessman, Swenson has brought together business partners to help André House with physical needs, such as regular repaving and marking of our parking lots. He has also brought together a group of faith-minded businessmen to volunteer regularly. The Swenson's have been faithful servants to André House and its guests experiencing homelessness. Truly, the Holy Spirit moves through them both as they fulfill the mission of the Congregation of Holy Cross.



THANK YOU *FR. DAN PONISCIAK C.S.C.* *DIRECTOR ANDRÉ HOUSE*

The pandemic is not over. While many of us here at André House, and around the world, would love the pandemic to be over, the reality of the situation is that it continues. However, despite the fact that the pandemic doesn't seem to be going anywhere anytime soon, we made the decision recently to reopen our dining room.

For the past 18 months, André House has responded to the ever-changing situation in front of us. A global pandemic that no one saw coming caused us to ask our volunteers to stay away, shut down our dining room, serve to-go out of the loading dock and streamline the number of services that we could provide. It took away our smiles and our hugs, replaced by a mask, a fear of being close to people and six feet of distance. In many respects, the pandemic made us focus on our priorities and forced us to be more creative in how we deliver our services.

One of the most critical priorities at the forefront of our minds was how to reopen our dining room as safely as possible to welcome our guests back inside out of the summer heat. How could we do it in such a way to welcome our volunteers back to prep, serve and clean up the evening meal service? The answer was through a tiny shot. Vaccinations allowed us to reopen the dining room. Without a vaccine, reopening the dining room would be impossible. But, our guests have suffered long enough enduring the hot summer temperatures while our services moved outside so our staff weighed the risk and made the decision.

And it's the staff that I'd to focus on for this reflection. Our dedicated staff that has endured so much over the past 18 months. The core staff of 2019-2020 that many of you who are reading this article never had a chance to meet arrived and served here for a year of service during the most challenging time in our history. Further, our administrative and maintenance teams, that have been committed to our mission all throughout the pandemic, are to be commended for the good work that was done during such an unprecedented time.

My friends, we are very cognizant of the fact that many if not all of our staff members have experienced some type of burnout over the past 18 months. We are continually thinking about how to support each other as we move into this new phase. Many of us have worked overtime to keep our services operational and as a result, we are tired. We are tired of the pandemic, but we are also acutely aware that we are not out of the woods yet. We will continue to do what we need to do to keep everyone safe and healthy. Masks are not going anywhere anytime soon and while I know that is frustrating to some, our André House staff have been doing it 12 hours a day for 18 months and they've helped us get to where we currently are. We are hopeful that the pandemic will end in the near future, but in the meantime, André House had to bring some normalcy, albeit a tempered normalcy, back to our guests by welcoming them back inside for dinner. We are also thrilled to be able to welcome back so many volunteers both old and new to our community and we look forward to growing in relationship with each of you as we enter this new phase of life.

So thank you to our dedicated team that has carried us during these treacherous times. Thank you to our covid regular volunteers who sustained us for the last year. Thank you to the Holy Cross priests and seminarians who supported our work when we needed them the most. Thank you to so many of you who donated to us from far and wide to support our mission. We have so much to be thankful for and we look forward together as one community to continuing our mission of offering compassion and love to all we meet.





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“OUR GUESTS WILL ALWAYS BE FED”



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