

MANNA MATTERS

DECEMBER 2020



THE ART OF COMFORT FOOD: MANNA CATERS

Several dreams have materialized for Manna Café this past year, including Manna CATERS, a six-month culinary training program led by trained chef Eddie Serrano. Launched in August of 2020, Manna CATERS prepares interns for employment as they learn skills such as safe food handling, cultural cuisine, catering fundamentals, and knife skills. All prepared food goes to Clarksville residents via Manna's hot meal program. I spoke to two of our current interns about their experiences.



Woodrow, a.k.a. Woody

Rachel, 26, says that for her, the program is about serving the less fortunate. "I'm taking what I love to do, which is eating and cooking, and helping others." Four times a week she attends class for hands-on instruction. A favorite topic was "cooking for multiples. I'm used to cooking for small numbers of people, so it was interesting learning how to serve a crowd. I'm able to use my creativity to make new dishes, and I cook each one as though I'm making it for myself. I'm learning a lot, and it's been amazing." After class on Wednesdays, Rachel takes food to Lincoln Homes housing community. Lead cook Rita Stinson says of Rachel, "She had minimal cooking experience when she started the course, but she overwhelmed us with her talent with spices and seasoning; she's done an excellent job."



Rachel

Continued on pg. 3

MISSION STATEMENT:
"Manna Cafe serves people in need in Clarksville/Montgomery County through a soup kitchen on wheels, food box distribution, and other vital resources. Propelled chiefly by volunteers, Manna Café strives to restore hope, dignity, self-reliance, community, and the love of God through Jesus Christ."

FIRST ANNUAL CLAY SHOOT



Many thanks to everyone who helped make Manna Cafe's first annual Shoot Down Hunger Clay Shoot a success. In spite of misting rain, 12 teams competed at this October 24 event at the gorgeous Cross Creek Clays in Palmyra, TN. Photos (top to bottom) feature Kenny with high score shooter Dennis Clapp; the Cross Creek Clays lodge; and Kenny with top event sponsor Thom Spigner and venue manager Melissa Wright.



SEARCHING FOR A STABLE

BY KENNY YORK

If you're like me as you look back on the past year, you're scratching your head and asking God, *What in the world was that?* Tornadoes, COVID-19, economic shutdown,

hurricanes, protests, elections ... and the list continues. Yet there's one topic we're not hearing about in the news or social media, and that's our homelessness crisis. There's a huge lack of beds to get people off the streets, especially at night. It's a nationwide

problem, but I can only speak about what's happening right here in Clarksville.

Seven years ago, when I stepped into the battle to get more shelter beds, there were about 85 beds between all the local agencies on any given night. When the temperature was below 32, we at Manna (with the help of local churches) opened a warming center with 50 additional beds, bringing the number to 130. At that time, about 500 people lived on the streets. That left 270 people with no choice but to live in tents, under bridges, in their cars, or on park benches.



I hoped things would get better, but seven years later they're worse than ever. Some agencies have changed their policies. For instance, one used to offer about 65 beds but now has nine. Because of COVID, the churches that offered Room in the Inn dropped out, removing another 15 to 20 beds. Thankfully, some of those beds

Continued on pg. 4



COMFORT FOOD, CONT'D.

Chef Eddie is passionate about the program. He says, "One of the most positive changes I've seen in my interns has been the restoration of their confidence, both in their cooking and interpersonal relationships. This is the chemistry for amazing dishes and maintaining a great learning atmosphere."

Intern Woodrow, a.k.a. Woody, describes Eddie as a "God-sent man. He's strict, but you can also see the gentle side of him. He teaches firmly by the culinary rules, but he's a lot of fun, too—and we listen to gospel music while we're cooking." Woody's philosophy is to "change our community and the

way they're eating with healthy, full-course meals. If we can eat a good, decent meal, then they can too."

What does Woody plan to do with his education? "My dream is to own a restaurant," he says,



"but if no one buys my food at least I can give it to the less fortunate and give back to my community the way my community gave to me."

Here's a summary of all current Manna Cafe programs, which are designed to help clients make permanent, healthy lifestyle changes:

Manna CATERS: A kitchen internship program providing culinary training for up to 12 participants per year with a pathway to employment upon course completion.

COVID-10 Relief Services: Provision of three additional weekly hot meals; hot showers; clothing/hygiene provisions; food box distribution in Stewart County; and "mini meals" during the summer for children.

Manna HELPS: Health Essentials, Learning, and Prevention Strategies: an umbrella program providing resources such as warming centers; clothing/blanket distribution; a free health clinic; a computer center; and community referral services.

Pickin' Up Manna: The "food rescue" program by which more than 1,000,000 lbs. of surplus food is gathered annually from local stores and then distributed to the hungry.

T2/Change for Change: A one-year diabetes prevention program that includes classes in nutrition and exercise sessions with a personal trainer.

Operation Pomegranate: Training in wholesome food preparation that includes to-go bags of fresh produce and recipe ingredients.

Food Distribution: Allocation of food boxes (30–60 lbs. each) to the food-insecure, 3 times/week.

Basic Adulging: Classes in life skills such as budgeting, home buying, managing stress, car maintenance, cleaning hacks, meal planning, and more.

Mobile Cafe: Community meals offering hot, nutritious plates of food, second helpings, and to-go boxes as well as clothing and household item distribution.

Mobile Pantry: One-day events during which full shopping carts of food are distributed to approximately 300 families.

STABLE, CONT'D.

have been replaced with hotel vouchers, and another local agency has opened four family rooms. Even so, when you do the math you realize that instead of gaining ground these past several years, we've lost almost 50 percent of our beds.

We try to make sure our homeless friends have what they need by giving out sleeping bags, tents, Sterno, and propane tanks. We tell them to find a place in the woods to hide and hunker down, and we'll do our best to

"Our community has allowed homeless shelters to be zoned out of existence."

keep them alive and safe. Meanwhile, we pray they don't get arrested for trespassing. It's not uncommon to hear that a homeless man or woman's tent and belongings have been destroyed in order to force them to leave an area. When this happens they find a new spot, only for the same thing to happen again.

The point is that there's nowhere for my homeless friends to go. Our community has allowed homeless shelters to be zoned out of existence. Code and zoning regulations have deemed nearly every available building in Clarksville unsuitable for shelter even though people can literally die from exposure. There's no place in Clarksville for most of the 500 homeless



Merry Christmas

from Kenny, Vicki,
and the Manna Cafe

How can you help your homeless neighbors this winter?

- Donate tents and other survival items to Manna Cafe, Hands & Feet for Christ, or fellow organizations Sheepdog Initiative, R41, or YAI Packs.
- Help finance and volunteer at Manna's 50-bed warming center during inclement weather.
- Contact Kenny at Kenny@MannaCafeMinistries.com if you know of a space that can be used as a warming center or tent city this winter.

people to lay their heads without possibly going to jail. How is that right? We can't keep ignoring the fact that, in Matthew 25, the Lord doesn't mention only feeding and clothing people—He also says, "I was a stranger and you invited me in" (v. 35, NIV).

I'll end with one last thought: when

Mary was about to give birth, there was no room in the inn, so Jesus was born in a stable. In our community, we've outlawed even the stable. Something's got to change, and it's up to us to make that change.

Peace out.