

The generosity of Venice on Vine and a Procter Gamble executive in Cincinnati leads to meals for the homeless

A young executive from the Procter & Gamble Company, Curtis Scribner, found it impossible to continue to ignore the requests for food and assistance by the number of homeless individuals he encountered on the streets of Cincinnati. He felt compelled to respond personally and approached a local restaurant, Venice on Vine. His intention was to purchase gift certificates for simple meals – perhaps a slice of pizza. His thought was that he would keep the certificates in his pocket and have them available when asked.

Additionally, he intended to simply post the certificates on busy street corners to make them available to those who might pass that would be in need of a meal.

The folks at Venice on Vine - Sister Judy Tensing, SND and her team - were immediately struck by the generosity of Curtis's plan. More than 30 years earlier Sister Judy was part of an extraordinary generation of men and women who intentionally remained and /or embedded themselves in Cincinnati's urban core (West End & Over-the-Rhine districts) at a time when those areas were described as some of the most economically challenged in the nation. The restaurant had been established for the purpose of creating a safe place where marginalized individuals could find some comfort, acquire employment skills, and ultimately be directed towards permanent employment.

Harnessing the Market for Good:

Sister Judy and her associates had through the years taught children to read and mothers to sew. They had bagged groceries and sent them out the back doors of area churches and taken parents to visit their incarcerated children in prison. Sister Judy began to examine the issues of the community through different lenses. She felt that if these communities were going to ultimately survive and young residents were to be able stay to raise their own families . . . they would need jobs.

Given that there was little work to be had in these communities, the nuns took it upon themselves to create small businesses to provide both skill training and employment for area youth. Sister Judy believed that the marketplace could be used for good. Her restaurant ultimately became a unique classroom and a thriving business offering critical employment opportunities.

So Curtis had come to the right place.

Could we do more?

The folks at the restaurant applauded this individual effort but questioned if more could not be accomplished if a mechanism could be created to challenge / invite others to consider getting involved.

The folks at Venice brought the concept to the Greater Cincinnati Homeless Coalition, which is a non-profit umbrella organization with nearly 90 member agencies individually dealing with the many causes and long-term implications of homelessness.

Additionally, the Coalition leverages its combined strength to address many of the public policy matters that directly impact homelessness and those experiencing it. The Coalition has most recently been successful in helping to maintain affordable housing within the larger community and in impacting municipal budgets.

Who are the people in need?

Experts suggest that there are many causes for homelessness. Those might include: a slow economic recovery, dramatic changes in the manufacturing and agricultural industries, lack of access to education, mental health challenges, chronic physical conditions, and a reduction in the number of affordable housing units.

- Statistically, Cincinnati has an alarming rate of poverty
- Many of those experiencing homelessness are returning Veterans unable to access the supports they need
- Cincinnati has one of the highest rates of childhood poverty in the nation
- At any given time, it is estimated that perhaps 2,000 individuals and families in Cincinnati are experiencing homelessness
- On any given night the most typical individual experiencing homelessness is a six year old child.

A Place at the Table:

A Place at the Table is a mechanism that invites diners within any restaurant to – upon the completion of their meal – voluntarily designate dollars to be collected and distributed to The Greater Cincinnati Homeless Coalition.

All funds will be collected and tracked by the Greater Cincinnati Foundation.

Dollars will be awarded on an annual basis to a member organization of the Coalition based upon a competitive grant process. Each year a request for grant proposals will be issued to member organizations providing them the opportunity to establish new demonstration projects and/or to replicate proven strategies currently not available locally to address the causes of homelessness and to reduce the number of individuals experiencing homelessness in Cincinnati.