

## February/March 2024 News

Make your gift today

### Looking for Walkers, Teams and Supporters!



Please join our "Hands On Hartford Friends & Family Team" for CT Foodshare's 2024 Walk Against Hunger!

You don't have to physically walk to raise funds for us, but we'd love for you and your friends, family, colleagues, business, school, civic group and/or faith community to join us in-person on [Saturday, May 4th](#) if you can!

Gates open at [8:00am](#) and the [1.5 mile walk begins at 10am at Dunkin' Park](#), home of the Hartford Yard Goats in downtown Hartford!

This year's walk will once again be a **TON OF FUN** and hosted by local media personalities **Scot Haney**, from WFSB/Channel 3 and **Renee DiNino** from iHeart Media/the River 105.9FM and our goal is pretty lofty - [we hope to raise \\$50,000 to support our food security programs](#).

### So why do we need your support?

#### ...Because the need is greater than ever before!

We rely on funds raised through the Walk to support our weekend **Kids Backpack Nutrition Program**, which delivers 8-9 pounds of healthy, easy-to-prepare, kid-friendly meals, (like chicken noodle soup, cereal, fruit cups, mac & cheese, and more!) to **over 225 kids**, from 8 Hartford schools and whose families are identified as low income, each and every weekend of the school year.

What we've learned is the majority of these kids end up sharing these meals with their siblings because food insecurity affects the whole family. We are proud to be able to help keep these students, and their siblings, nourished throughout the weekend so they are ready to tackle school again come Monday morning.

We also rely on these funds so we can continue to provide **fresh produce, milk, eggs, bread, meat/halal meat, nonperishables and toiletries** to over 1,000 (and growing!) low-income households a month through our **MANNA Community Pantry**. We've seen a huge uptick in need over the past year, nearly doubling our pantry participant numbers, due to a variety of reasons including: SNAP benefit changes, high inflation, higher rental costs, pandemic-era assistance ending and the word getting out about our amazing pantry!

## Interested in joining or supporting us?

Register to create a team, join our team, or register just to donate [HERE](#) and be sure to select Hands On Hartford as your designated charity-recipient. If you do, we'll receive 100% of the funds you raise, which will go toward supporting both our Kids Backpack Nutrition Program and our MANNA Community Pantry.

### How to register:

- You can **Register to Join our Team** - *Hands On Hartford Friends & Family Team* then go on to Register and then Reserve.
- You can also **Create and Register your own Team**, then go onto Select your Agency Choice: *Hands On Hartford* as the Recipient.
- You can also **Register Just Yourself**, then Select your Agency Choice: *Hands On Hartford* as the Recipient.

If you have any problems or questions, please contact Kelly Dougherty at [kdougherty@handsonhartford.org](mailto:kdougherty@handsonhartford.org).



Join us [HERE!](#)

## Faith in Action



Sending out a huge shout-out to First Presbyterian Church, Hartford and its Youth Group for this year's Souper Bowl of Caring donation.

This church, one of our founding congregations who have been involved in our work for 55 years, does an annual collection for the food pantry and this year they donated 1,215 pounds of food!

Special thanks to our Super-Volunteer Andrew May for volunteering to pick up the food and drive it to our pantry.



## Save These Dates!



**HANDS & HEARTS  
TOGETHER** CELEBRATING OUR LEGACY

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 17, 2024, 5:30 PM  
THE CONNECTICUT CONVENTION CENTER

Save the date of  
**Thursday, October 17, 2024**  
for our **Hands & Hearts Together**  
Celebration!

This Year's Event will be a  
Double Celebration:  
**Executive Director  
Barbara Shaw's Retirement** as well  
as **our 55th Anniversary!**

Keep a look out for additional event  
info and sponsorship opps!

Questions, interested in sponsoring  
our event or  
donating an auction item?  
Contact Donna Colliton at  
[dcolliton@handsonhartford.org](mailto:dcolliton@handsonhartford.org)

**HANDS ON HARTFORD.**  
 INVITES YOU TO A **FREE** HOLIDAY MEAL!  
 LET'S CELEBRATE TOGETHER!

# Easter Sunday

MARCH 31ST, 2024 | DOORS OPEN AT 10AM  
 MEAL SERVED: 11:30AM - 1:30PM  
 LOCATED AT HANDS ON HARTFORD  
 55 BARTHOLOMEW AVE, HARTFORD, CT  
 (OFF OF PARK ST, TWO BLOCKS WEST OF POPE PARK)

**MENU:**  
 Roasted Herbed Chicken with Red Bliss Potatoes,  
 Mixed Veggies, Tossed Green Salad,  
 and a Brownie for dessert.  
 Vegetarian option available.

EASTER BASKETS  
 for Kids ages 10 and under present!  
 Call: 860-728-3201 with any questions.  
 Bus passes are available in case of bad weather!

We hope you'll join us for our next **free community holiday meal** on **Sunday, March 31, 2024** here at Hands On Hartford!

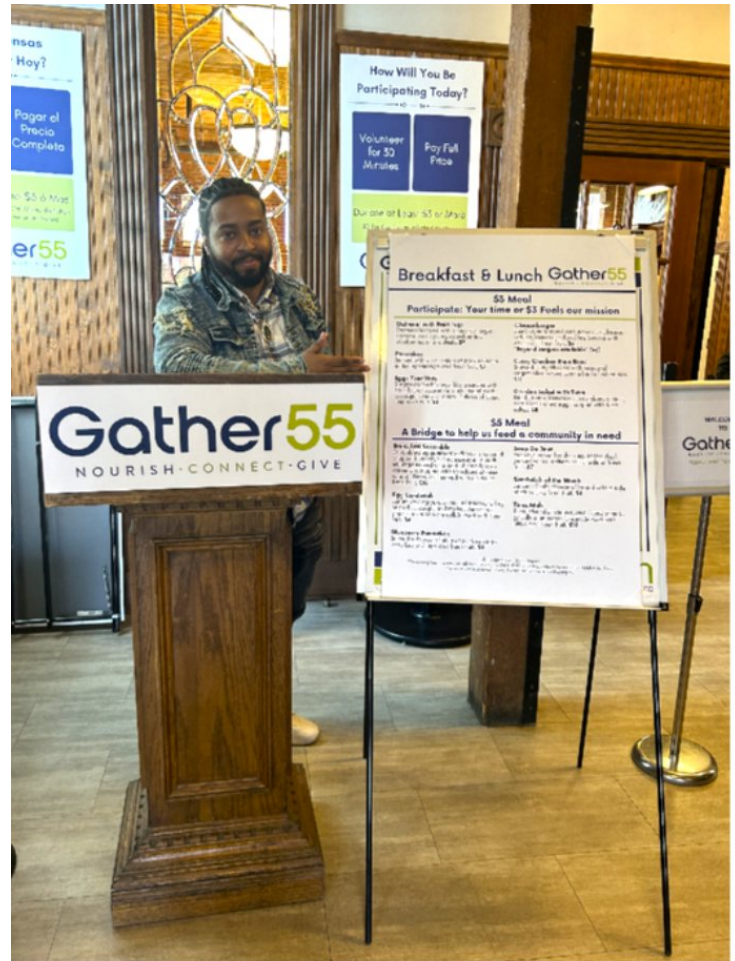
Enjoy getting to know your neighbors over delicious food and fellowship.

We even have **Easter baskets** for kids ages 10 and under who attend.

Doors open at **10:00am** and our meal is served from **11:30am-1:30pm**.

**Please help us spread the word!**

## Gather55 Daytime Update



**Please Come In and Check Out Gather55 Day's New \$3 and \$5 Menu!**

**We are enhancing our "Participation Cafe" model and at the same time continuing to address the needs of the community that we serve each day!**

**Hope to See You Soon!**

Breakfast is served from 9am to 2pm and  
Lunch is served from 11am to 2pm Monday through Thursday!

## Gather55 Dinner Update

**Gather55**  
NOURISH • CONNECT • GIVE

Meet March's Guest Chef,  
Joe Cusano of Le Mazet



About Joe Cusano

*"My love for cooking stems from childhood, watching my mom prepare elaborate Sunday dinners in our Italian household and growing up on a farm, where we raised animals and crops for our meals. This upbringing instilled a deep appreciation for food. I honed my skills at Johnson & Wales University, studying Culinary Arts and food service management for 4 years. Afterward, I gained experience at various local restaurants in Southington before spending 11 years at Max Downtown, refining my craft. Now, as the executive chef at Le Mazet in West Hartford, I continue to grow and innovate in this new culinary venture."*

### Gather55 Restaurant Welcomes Guest Chef Joe Cusano

"At Le Mazet, we wanted to give back to the community. Our Team at Le Mazet treats everyone who walks into the door like family and we wanted to give some of that love back into the community."

*Joe's signature  
dishes that will be  
added to March's  
Menu:*

**APPETIZER:**

**Beef Tartare**

*Tenderloin Tail, Panisse,  
Quail Egg*

**ENTREE:**

**Coq Au Vin D'Alsace**

*Chicken Thigh, Mirepoix,  
Mushroom*

**DESSERT:**

**Hazelnut Crème Brulee**

*Vanilla, Custard,  
Shortbread*



*“As most of you know, Gather55 is an Initiative of Hands On Hartford’s, that is dedicated to serving Hartford’s most economically-challenged residents. When you dine at Gather55, a one-of-a-kind restaurant with a community-focused mission, you’re not just experiencing a five-star dining experience, you are also supporting Gather55’s daytime “Participation Model” cafe that addresses the needs of the community that we serve each day!*

*To add a little more excitement, this Spring, I’ll be rolling out a wine dinner series, jazz nights, and private events. Next time you’re visiting Harford, I hope you’ll swing by Gather55 to try my signature lobster ravioli as well as many of the other delicious dishes on our menu. I look forward to seeing you soon!”*

*-Chef Rob Maffucci*



Follow our Facebook page [HERE](#), our IG page [HERE](#), or check out our website at [www.gather55.com](http://www.gather55.com)!

[MAKE A RESERVATION HERE](#)

**A well-deserved honor!**



**Hands On Hartford  
Board Member,  
Nichole Berklas,  
Named One of the  
Pro Bono Partnership  
Volunteers of the Year!**

Nichole, who is an active Hands On Hartford Board Member, is an attorney at Bocarsly, Emden, Cowan, Ismail & Arndt LLP. She also provides pro bono legal services as a volunteer at the Pro Bono Partnership.

The Pro Bono Partnership provides free legal services to nonprofits throughout the tristate area. It collaborates with about 1,500 volunteers annually, which then allows the Partnership to serve the legal needs of more than 1,000 local nonprofits.

**Congratulations Nichole!**



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## **Staff Updates** (since December 2023)



**Dawn Tyson**  
*Outreach Coordinator*

(new staff)



**Julio Espinoza**  
Basic Needs/  
Neighborhood Services Coordinator

(new staff)

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**Brianna Boirie**  
*Community Engagement  
Program Coordinator*

(new staff)



**Kelly Dougherty**  
*Community Engagement Partnerships &  
Communications Coordinator*

(promotion)



**Lacey Brown**  
*Tenant Assistant*

(new staff)



**Kim Zajac**  
*Lead Bookkeeper*

(promotion)



**Crystal Jenkins**  
*Cafe Associate*

(new staff)



**Raymond Ortiz**  
*Gather55 Greeter*

(new staff)



## Positive Projects & Partnerships

Our dear friends at **Jack & Jill of America** made a huge impact for our community early this year! In partnership with the Red Cross and Hands On Hartford, they led a community blood drive, backpack food packing event, food donation drop-off and community pantry stocking event in honor of MLK Jr. Day. They inspired **38 people to donate a total of 25 units of blood, collected 885 items of food totaling 325 lbs, and packed over 225 backpacks**. We are so inspired by their joy to serve and teach their children the meaning of leadership in action.

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We were thrilled when our new friend **Julissa Pabon**, Alumni Engagement Officer for **UHART Alumni Association**, reached out to us to set up a first-time volunteering opportunity for her group. This group of four did an awesome job (at a very busy time) **helping out in both the front AND back of house of our Gather55 daytime restaurant**, serving coffee and water, running food to tables, helping clean and ultimately making meaningful connections with our guests...and even with each other, as the fun part about this group is some of them were meeting each other for the first time, as alums! We loved having this hardworking and friendly bunch and hope they'll be back to volunteer again soon!

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## Help Needed to Support Hartford's Youth!



As you may have read earlier, Hands On Hartford provides over **225 kids from eight Hartford schools**, 8-9 pounds of easy-to-prepare, kid-friendly and nourishing food each week throughout the school year...

As a result, we're in great need of **contacts for businesses, faith groups, community organizations, and grocery stores/markets** who you think would be willing to help collect food for this program on an **ongoing basis**.

We're also looking for special "backpack enhancement" sponsors to help purchase a special treat added to each bag each week. This can include hot cocoa kits, coloring books and colored pencils, jump ropes, simple craft projects and more.

Reach out to **Donna Colliton** at 860-706-1538 or email her [HERE](#) for more info or to let us know if you, or a business/group you know, may be interested!

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## Hands On Hartford is Hiring!

Hands On Hartford staff are dedicated, caring, and hardworking people who like to have fun while making a difference in our community. With great benefits, staff recognition and support, we value teamwork, compassion and community.

**Check out these open positions and help us spread the word:**

- **Gather55 Prep Cook/Dishwasher (Part Time)**
- **Tenant Assistant (Part Time)**
- **Homeless Outreach Case Manager**
- **Senior Manager of Human Resources**
- **Bookkeeper (Part Time)**



**Find out more about these positions and how to apply [HERE](#)!**

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## About Hands On Hartford

Hands On Hartford, in partnership with others, strengthens

community in Hartford by responding faithfully to people in need through programs that change lives and renew human possibility.

We are committed to increasing food security and nutrition, improving health and providing housing while we engage volunteers and connect communities.



## How Can I Help?

**Make a donation!** You will be part of a network of donors, volunteers and staff who work together to provide food, housing and related services for families who are struggling to make ends meet. To make a financial donation, visit our website at [www.handsonhartford.org](http://www.handsonhartford.org) and click "Make a Donation Now," or mail your check to Hands On Hartford, 55 Bartholomew Avenue, Hartford, CT 06106.

**Or contact Donna Colliton at [dcolliton@handsonhartford.org](mailto:dcolliton@handsonhartford.org)** for more in-kind donation ideas.

**Request a matching donation from your employer!** Many employers will match all or part of your donation - a great way to double your impact.

**Leave a legacy.** Ensure your long term impact on this community by including us in your estate plan, making qualified charitable distributions from your IRA, gifts of appreciated stock, or include us as a contingent beneficiary of your life insurance. Contact Executive Director, Barbara Shaw, at [bshaw@handsonhartford.org](mailto:bshaw@handsonhartford.org) or 860- 706-1502, to explore planned giving ideas and to join our Legacy Society.

***We are grateful for our community and the love, caring, compassion and support we see every day.***



Visit our website



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