

July/August 2024 News

Make your gift today

Giving Back Through Backpacks

When one thinks of “**childhood hunger**”, perceptions of what that “looks like” can vary widely amongst different people, sometimes calling to mind graphic images in the news. It is vital to note, however, that hunger can often present in an inconspicuous tone in our society, often hiding behind the agitation and aggression of a child who is wrestling with behavioral issues, or the frustration of a student who has trouble concentrating, retaining information, or staying awake in the classroom, or the student whose grades consistently fall below those of their classmates’ or of their own potential. What we may presume to be symptoms of mental health issues or “just being a kid”, can often actually be a symptom of a different trigger – that of **malnourishment**. Kids, just as adults, need not only enough food, but enough *quality* foods, to keep their brain and body healthy enough to learn, grow and be challenged.

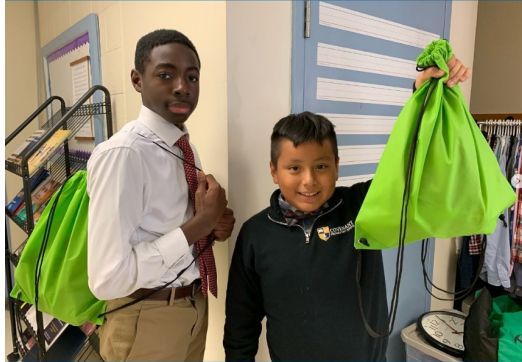


According to “**Feeding America**”, a “nationwide network of food banks, food pantries and local meal programs...[whose goal is to] help people get the food and resources they need to thrive”, **13 million children in the U.S. are food insecure and 1 in 5 children are categorized as “facing hunger”**. Further, according to Feeding America’s most recent data from their 2022 “Map the Gap” report (more info

[HERE](#)), in the Capitol Planning Region alone (which includes Hartford), the **food insecurity rate amongst children is 16.7% or a staggering 33,520 children**. Additionally, data reports **1 in 6 children in Connecticut are experiencing hunger**.

In light of this ongoing crisis, in 2006, Hands On Hartford introduced the kids’ weekend “**Backpack Nutrition Program**”, starting with 2 elementary schools. The program has grown

significantly since its inception, evolving into partnerships with **eight Hartford schools** (including Breakthrough North, Burns, Covenant Prep, Dwight, MLK, Parkville, Trinity Academy, and Wish) and providing food for over 225 children identified, by their respective school, as “food insecure” or “facing hunger”. **Through participant surveys, it was also discovered**



that the majority of students enrolled in the Backpack Nutrition Program actually end up sharing their meals with sibling(s), further stressing the importance and need for this initiative. The work is supported by an incredible team of Hands On Hartford employees and about **30 volunteers**, who split their time throughout the week sorting, stocking, labeling, counting, packing and delivering the backpacks each and every Thursday throughout the school year.

>>[CONTINUE READING ARTICLE HERE](#)

Faith in Action



Date: Sunday, September 22

Time: 2:00-3:30pm

**Location: Hands On Hartford
(55 Bartholomew Ave, Hartford)**

Join us on **Sunday, Sept. 22** for a memorable Book Talk featuring author **Sue Carey!**

Sue's book, ***More Than Merely Eyes Can See***, was birthed out of the Friday evening gatherings held each week at **Grace Lutheran Church** in Hartford.

In her book, Sue shares the stories of struggle, hope, triumph and sometimes brutal honesty of many folks who attend those gatherings—people who meet up to enjoy a free dinner and to make meaningful connections. Her book further explores a variety of lessons and perspectives.

This is an event you won't want to miss!

Please RSVP by clicking **[HERE](#)**. Let's celebrate the magic of storytelling together.

Save The Date!

You're invited to the



Please Join Us for Hands On Hartford's
Annual Hands & Hearts Together
to Celebrate
Our 55th Anniversary
&
Executive Director,
Barbara Shaw's Retirement!

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 17, 2024 | 5:30 PM - 8:30 PM
CONNECTICUT CONVENTION CENTER
100 COLUMBUS BLVD, HARTFORD, CT

Reception with
Eclectic Hors D'Oeuvres & Desserts
Silent & Live Auctions

\$160 per Person (til 9/10/24)

\$185 per Person (after 9/10/24)

10% Discount for Purchasing 10 or more Tickets

*An engaging evening with friends of Hands On Hartford,
new and old, as we celebrate our legacy that has
changed lives in Hartford since 1969!*

celebration of the year!

Please join us on
Thursday, October 17, 2024
for Hands & Hearts Together!

*Enjoy a reception with
eclectic hors d'oeuvres
stations and desserts,
live entertainment,
a silent and live auction and
an inspiring,
celebratory program!*

[Get your tickets today!](#)

**Early Bird Discount
until Sept. 10!**

Tickets can be purchased
[HERE!](#)

(It's also not too late to be an
event sponsor or
donate an auction item!)

Email Donna Colliton at
dcolliton@handsonhartford.org

2024

Lead Event Sponsor

TRAVELERS

Reflecting on a Remarkable Journey



As **Hands On Hartford's Executive Director Barbara Shaw** approaches retirement, we're honored to share this wonderful article, written by Susan Campbell, where she reflects on Barbara's incredible career and the profound impact she's made.

Click the link [HERE](#) to explore this inspiring read!

Celebrating Labor Day!

Nearly 270 folks from our community
enjoyed a free holiday meal this

Labor Day here at Hands On Hartford!



Guests enjoyed getting to know their neighbors over a delicious meal of veggie or meat lasagna, salad, roasted veggies, dinner rolls and cupcakes!

Kids who attended were invited to participate in some special activities, including face-painting. They were also gifted with some new children's books and small goodie bag.

Thank you to **Talcott Financial Group** for sponsoring our meal and to our friends at **CGI** for sponsoring our first ever mindfulness kit giveaways for adults, which were a big hit!

We are also so grateful to all of the volunteers and HOH staff who helped make this event so special!



In Need of Legal Aid?

Have you met our friend Rafael? He is one of our beloved volunteers! Aside from making everyone at HOH smile, Attorney **Rafael Rodriguez Cruz** provides **free legal advice** to low income individuals and their families in the following areas: divorce, custody, restraining orders, evictions, housing conditions, pardons, benefits (SNAP, Medicaid, SAGA, SSI, TFA), immigration status issues for victims of family violence or sexual violence, healthcare instructions for seniors, special education, and school discipline. **Rafael's services are available at HOH every Tuesday and every 1st & 3rd Wednesday from 9am-3pm.**



Love Gather55? Make Your Voice Heard!

CRAZIES
CONNECTICUT RESTAURANT ASSOCIATION AWARDS
VOTE GATHER 55
for People's Choice



YOUR FAVORITE RESTAURANT, DINING ESTABLISHMENT OR LOCAL HOTSPOT IN CONNECTICUT. OPEN TO FULL RANGE OF DINING CONCEPTS, RESTAURANT TYPES AND DIVERSITY OF CUISINES.

Please nominate Gather55 in the **"People's Choice"** category for the CT Restaurant Association Awards (aka the **"CRAZIES AWARDS"**)

[**HERE!**](#)

We're dedicated to creating a warm, welcoming space where everyone, regardless of their ability to pay, can enjoy delicious, nourishing food and connect with a diverse community.

Help recognize our special initiative by nominating us, **by September 13**, to be on the ballot (and then voting for us, later, if we make the ballot)!



"YOU GET BACK AS MUCH AS YOU GIVE. YOU SEE DIRECTLY WHERE EVERYTHING IS GOING...AND EVERYONE WHO WORKS HERE IS FANTASTIC!"

Gather55 Doer Jessica Probolus



"GATHER 55 IS A GREAT WAY FOR HARTFORD TO EXPERIENCE INSPIRED CUISINE BY CHEFS INVESTED IN FOOD SECURITY AND ACCESS. I LOOK FORWARD TO EXPLORING THEIR NEW OFFERINGS EVERY MONTH!"

Diner Katrice Claudio



IT'S HARD NOT TO GUSH! I'VE HAD MANY VOLUNTEER JOBS OVER THE YEARS, BUT NONE COMES CLOSE TO GATHER 55.

Volunteer and 'Doer' Lynn Everett



"I LOVE IT! I GET TO INTERACT WITH SO MANY PEOPLE, TALK ABOUT THEIR LIVES, AND JUST GET TO KNOW EVERYONE. VOLUNTEERING HERE IS REALLY FUN!"

'Doer' Sister Georgia Stevenson



IT'S THE PERFECT PLACE TO GET INVOLVED WITH THE COMMUNITY...AND THE FOOD IS SLAMMING!

Gather55 Diner Shondale



IT IS REWARDING TO BE ABLE TO WAIT ON AND SERVE EVERYONE HERE. ALSO, THE FOOD IS GREAT!

Gather55 Doer & Diner: Cora



"I love to see the excitement of people coming back day after day. They want to be here; they feel a sense of community."

Nathalie Vargas, Community Engagement Specialist



"THE DINERS HERE LOVE PLAYING, AND I LOVE BRINGING SOMETHING THAT'S FUN AND CAN HELP THEM GET BACK ON THEIR FEET."

Gather55 Doer: Bingo Lady



"GATHER 55'S CONCEPT ...IT'S SOMETHING WE DESPERATELY NEED MORE OF IN THE WORLD TODAY."

Volunteer Marc Berube

Gather55 Dinner Updates

Gather55 and Back East Brewing
Presents

Beer and Bacon Dinner menu

FIRST COURSE

Bacon Beer Cheese Soup

with Crispy Bacon Apple Streusel

paired with Ice Cream Man IPA / 6.4%

An everyday treat, the one you know and love. Sip into nostalgia with our take on a timeless New England IPA. Rated #5 on Draft Magazine's list of "Top 50 IPAs"

SECOND COURSE

Smoked Pork Belly & Diver Scallop

paired with Premium Lager / 5.1%

Crisp, clean and carefully crafted.

Our new House Lager, crafted for those who appreciate excellence in subtlety.

MAIN COURSE

Pasta Carbonara

with Imported Italian Guanciale and House Made Spaghetti

paired with Test Depth Lager / 4.3%

A very light, crisp and smooth lager with zero bitterness.

DESSERT

Bacon Maple Cake

with Bacon Buttercream and Topped with Candied Bacon

paired with Porter / 6%

Our classic English-style Brown Porter, with roasted notes of chocolate & coffee.

Our medal winner; 2017 GABF Gold, 2016 GABF Bronze (plus many others).

**Tickets go on Sale soon for Gather55's
Beer & Bacon Dinner
being held on September 26th at 6 pm!
Stay tuned to our Social Media Pages for Updates!
Hope you can Join in on the Fun!**



SEPTEMBER
**GUEST
CHEF**

Chef Ani Robaina
Ani's Table & Marketplace

Gather55
NOURISH. CONNECT. GIVE
55 Bartholomew Ave. Hartford, CT

We have exciting news!!
Announcing our
September Guest Chef:
Chef Ani Robaina

of

Ani's Table and Ani's Table & Marketplace!

Chef Ani will kick off her menu on Wednesday, Sept. 4!

We hope you'll join us!

The opening nights with our Guest Chefs are always a ton of fun!

Ani Robaina's love for cooking was kindled in her family's kitchen, where, as the daughter of **Cuban** immigrants, she learned to craft traditional dishes like empanadas, ceviche, flan & guava desserts. This passion for culinary arts led her to pursue a career in cooking after attending the **University of Connecticut**. She then enrolled in the prestigious French Culinary Institute led by Chef Jacques Pepin in New York City only to later work alongside culinary icons at the **James Beard Award-winning Fuller's Restaurant in Seattle**.

After leaving to pursue her own career, she became the **first female executive chef at several restaurants** including the Hartford Canoe Club and The Pond House Café in Connecticut. While at the helm of these kitchens, she led large staffs to run hundreds of events annually, establishing herself **as a leader and accomplished event planner in the culinary scene** – particularly in her home state of CT.

In January 2020, Ani launched **Ani's Table**, a catering venture that reflects her

culinary creativity and expertise. Ani recently opened **Ani's Table & Marketplace** in **Rocky Hill**, a catering hub and destination for food lovers with delicious grab-and-go lunch options, scratch-prepared foods, signature espresso blends and a curated selection of imported products.

We are so grateful for our special relationship with Chef Ani and are thrilled to have her showcase her exceptional cuisine and artistry to our guests this month. Check out her dishes we'll be debuting below:

Chef Ani's Selections

Appetizer

Cuban / Korean

Empanada

House Cured Kimchi Empanada

Napa cabbage, daikon, carrots, apple, fermented shrimp, gojugaru pepper

Picadillo Empanada

*Ground beef, capers, olives, golden raisins, shallots, red peppers & sherry
W/ a Gochujang Chimichurri Sauce*

Entree

Malbec Braised Beef

Short rib

Butter poached leek mashed Yukon gold potatoes Rice Flour Deep Fried leek greens

Dessert

Trio of Mini Frozen

Palettas

*Vietnamese Coffee Thai Tea
Coconut Matcha*

Reminder!

You can order any of the delicious items on our menu and have them **delivered straight to your door!**

Follow our Facebook page [HERE](#) and our IG page [HERE](#).

**MAKE A RESERVATION OR ORDER DELIVERY
HERE!**

Our "Lending Library" is in Need of Books!

Do you have any page turners you'd like to pass on? Well, our **lending library** at Gather55 is in need of some!



Diners love coming in and grabbing a novel to read over a delicious meal and we love being able to offer them!

Donations are most appreciated and are accepted Monday through Friday 9am-5pm at Hands On Hartford's Center for Community: 55 Bartholomew Ave Hartford, CT 06106.

An Epic Day To Remember!

July 25, 2024 will forever live in our hearts as the most prolific day of community partnerships EVER! Here's why....

As an affiliate of **Points of Light**, we partnered with this amazing **global volunteer network** to organize and facilitate a truly **MASSIVE community day of IMPACT** for an impressive **150 employees of CarMax**, many of who drove several hours, from all over the Northeast, just to participate!

Knowing we had limited capacity for a group this size at HOH, we reached out to our friends and fellow nonprofit partners, **Levo International**, who were eager to have "the most volunteers they've ever led" help them build twenty-five 20 ft. **hydroponics systems** from scratch- from cutting wood to sanding, painting, assembling, drilling, planting, and more, this team of go-getters almost completely finished the project in time, just before the skies opened up.



These systems will provide between **10,000-20,000 pounds of fresh produce every year for one of CT's biggest food deserts- the North End of Hartford.**

And we can't forget to note our 4th partnership of the day with the **University of Hartford**, who graciously allowed us to use their parking lots for both parking and project execution and who provided tours of their very hip "**Nosh**" pantry, which provides toiletries, nonperishables and even fresh produce for UHART students and faculty in need.

Full circle moment- The NOSH food pantry will receive some fresh produce from these very hydroponics later this year! To kick off the giving, they received a **generous donation** of fresh fruit platters, muffins, bagels, and lovingly-prepared boxed lunches from our 5th partnership, with our very own **Gather55 restaurant**, who provided catering for the day.

Thank you to ALL 5 of our **community partners: Points of Light, Carmax, Levo International, UHART, and Gather55** for this exceptional team-building and

collaborative effort to help meet the urgent needs of our Hartford community. We all shine brighter when we shine together ! We are proud to partner with you all in being **Difference-Makers!**



Positive Projects and Partnerships

We just LOVE our friends at **CGI!**

When it rains, sometimes it pours...PRODUCE that is (at least when our friends from **CGI** are involved)!

We recently welcomed 5 interns from CGI for a **volunteer-variety morning** helping us with any tasks needed that our regular, daily volunteers were unable to fulfill that day.

They braved the rain to harvest dozens of produce for our **Gather55 Restaurant** and our **MANNA Community Pantry**, packed



over **100 snack kits for our Homeless Outreach Team**, and helped with sorting, stocking and labeling tasks in our **MANNA Community Pantry**. We are so glad a bit of drizzling didn't dampen this group's eagerness to give back to our Hartford neighbors.

Further, CGI shared even more of their generosity a couple weeks later when their employees came to Hands On Hartford for a special volunteer service project, which included **lunch by Gather55, a thorough tour** of our building and programs, and our **first-ever mindfulness kit packing event**, which included creating close to 300 colorful drawstring backpacks with English or Spanish **word puzzles, motivational-themed coloring books for adults, a pack of color pencils, pens and pencils with inspirational phrases, and more - all funded and assembled by CGI.**

These kits were distributed out to guests for our **Labor Day Community Holiday meal** and to **folks living unhoused**, who expressed interest in having our **Homeless Outreach team** provide gifts that can help stimulate and support mind wellness. Thank you for being such wonderful partners, CGI!



The Hartford Wanderers Rugby Football Club, a 501(c)3 non-profit corporation, came to HOH energized and ready to give back to our Hartford neighbors - and did they ever! **They spent the entire morning reorganizing our MANNA Community Pantry** to ensure a more streamlined experience for both our pantry participants and volunteers. It looks even more beautiful than before! Their support with this project was crucial, as **our Pantry continues to serve over 1,000 households a month.** Thank you so much Hartford Wanderers!!



We love our volunteers! **Rosie and Bob** started volunteering in Gather55 last summer. When we asked them why they come to Gather55 every week to give their time, they told us:

“We love being here where everyone is treated with absolute respect. We feel needed, appreciated, and have gotten to know many of the diners well! It’s a joy to not only serve but to listen and connect. Gather55 is a place where that happens.”

Thank you, Rosie and Bob, for sharing your joy and service with us over the last year!



Our Community Engagement Team hosted an **EPIC service project** at Hands On Hartford with close to 60 of the most gracious, attentive, and respectful students (plus faculty) from the **University of Hartford!**



Since the students attending were all new Freshman to UHART and just starting their first few days of school, we started with a fun "getting to know you" **icebreaker activity** with prizes. The students then broke up into teams for a tour of HOH with a quick trivia game to follow, then enjoyed a delicious pasta buffet provided by our **Gather55 restaurant**, followed by a **school supply packing event** that included a **Hispanic Heritage** month theme and bilingual messages, and finally wrapped the day up with a heartfelt and interactive **Faces of Homelessness Speaking Event**.



A few of the students were so moved by our Faces of Homelessness Speaker **Rosemary Rainey**, that they even gifted her with some heartfelt hugs and many shared their gratitude for the whole experience and delight with their lunch. We were so touched and wish all of these students a fun and successful first year!



For those interested in scheduling a Faces of Homelessness Speakers' Bureau event or scheduling a Customized Service Project, please visit our website and fill out an interest form [HERE!](#)

Please help us welcome our new team members!



RJ Cermola
Peer Support Specialist



Danielle Soto
Food Access Specialist

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:

- Senior Manager of Finance
- Homeless Outreach Nurse
- Senior Outreach Case Manager
- Tenant Assistant – Weekends
- Tenant Assistant – Second Shift
- Gather55 Front of House Server Pier Diem

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

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 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 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 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.



PROUD AFFILIATE

**POINTS
OF LIGHT**
GLOBAL NETWORK



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