



PHOTO BY JUSTIN KATIGBAK

## We're Battling Indifference

BY SCOTT KERMAN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As I write this, we are five months into serving a community that has been devastated by the COVID-19 crisis. Most of our meal guests have had no reprieve from living outdoors in squalor and no sign that their situations will change any time soon.

The COVID-19 crisis, and the economic strain accompanying it, has increased stress on our guests tremendously, especially for those experiencing mental illness or addiction. At Blanchet House, we have witnessed the toll on their wellbeing over these five months. We see the effect living in deprived conditions has had on the guests we knew from before the pandemic. And we see the confusion, anxiety, and even anger among the many new faces who come to us for food each day.

Five months into this crisis, we see greater desperation and impatience in line, more trash and human waste around our building, and even a cracked window caused by a guest so traumatized that they repeatedly smashed their head against it. This tension brings added emotional and financial cost to our services. Our service during this crisis is not easy; the challenges are significant.

Yet, we are steadfast in our commitment to provide daily meals, meet other needs as we can, and offer compassion and hope.

I am mindful of what Pope Francis recently said that these times call on us to commit "to defending the inherent dignity of every person." Pope Francis continued, "While we work for the cure of a virus that affects everyone without distinction, faith urges us to work seriously and act to fight indifference in the face of violations of human dignity."

Blanchet House is actively fighting the indifference too often felt by the people we serve.

Each cup of coffee, each sack lunch, each hot meal, each pair of socks communicates to our guests that we care about them.

Every volunteer who kindly looks our guests in the eye, the artwork, and words of support that decorate sack lunches, and each donated re-usable water bottle affirms the human dignity of our houseless and food insecure guests. These sincere acts of kindness let our guests know that they are not alone and that our community has not forsaken them.

The support of the Blanchet House community over these five months has been extraordinary and inspiring. You have given so much already, but I must be unabashed in asking even more of you. We are in this service for the duration, sustained beyond measure by your support, your inspirational words, and your gifts.

Your support keeps us going. More importantly, it provides hope and dignity to the people we serve.



**"Patrick" told us that he doesn't know how he'll secure housing quickly with his disability income. For now, he sleeps outside and gets his meals from us.**

BLANCHET FARM



Blanchet Farm resident Jordan holds a bee smoker.

## Therapeutic Beekeeping Comes to Blanchet Farm

There is so much going on in the world right now, but we can't forget the people struggling with addiction. Because of your generous support our farm offers a one-of-a-kind free program to men longing to gain sobriety and better health.

Jordan Shahrazi has been living at the farm for four months. Previously he'd been homeless in Portland, addicted to meth, and struggling

to manage his schizophrenia. He needed a place to stay long-term that provided support, help to make medical appointments, and hands-on work to build sobriety.

Our new beekeeping program created by volunteer Katy Fackler offers a productive way for him to gain self-worth and responsibility.

Now instead of using drugs to numb his pain, Jordan keeps busy learning to take care of bees and their hives.

"I love it here," said Jordan. "Instead of using, which I used to do when things went bad, I now take care of bees."

A master beekeeper, Katy built and installed four hives. She goes out every month to guide Jordan and others through the daily upkeep process. She plans to harvest the honey starting next year.

"Learning new skills, being present in nature, and doing meaningful work are core reset and recovery tools for all of us," said Fackler.

Your generous donations make the beekeeping program possible. Thank you for caring.

***"Instead of using drugs, I now take care of bees."***



Volunteer beekeeper Katy Fackler teaches Jordan beekeeping.

## Restaurant Closures Bring Top Chefs to Blanchet House

Sadly COVID-19 caused many beloved restaurants to close leaving their staff furloughed or unemployed. But luckily for our guests and residents, Portland chefs and kitchen staff found a way to stay useful by volunteering their time and talent in our kitchen!



Top Chef Gregory Gourdet and staff from his restaurant, Departure, volunteered to cook meals.

Top Chef star and James Beard award-winning chef of Departure restaurant, Gregory Gourdet, humbly showed up every Monday and Tuesday to prepare meals. His staff also joined him in prepping and cooking.

"Every day we walk into the Blanchet House, we see the [homeless] community outside," Gourdet said. "We want to cook, support, help people, nourish people."

Blanchet House of Hospitality has always offered respite to people with varied struggles. We're so glad that we could offer chefs a place to feel needed during this uncertain time.

If you're interested in helping with meal prep or volunteering in other ways, please sign up on our website at [www.BlanchetHouse.org/Volunteer](http://www.BlanchetHouse.org/Volunteer).

# Water Program for Homeless

Access to drinking water can be hard to find for homeless people living on the streets. During hot summer temperatures, they desperately need water to carry with them and keep for drinking and cleaning.

"We thought if we could get water bottles donated then we could fill the bottles and hand them out during meal service. They could also bring the bottles back and have them refilled," says Scott Kerman, our Executive Director.



**We have water for dogs too!**

Because of your generous support we were able to fill and give out thousands of reusable bottles of water this summer.

"Our new guests are often surprised that there are people out there who care enough about them to spend their own money or donate," says Scott. "It means the world to the people we serve because it tells them that they matter."

Thank you to everyone supporting our programs created to alleviate suffering.



**The Todd family donated 297 water bottles to our water program.**



**MEAL PROGRAM**

## Families Make Sack Lunches to Meet Need During COVID-19

Within weeks of closing our cafe due to COVID-19 dining protocols Blanchet House was serving an average of 2,000 meals a day—double our usual numbers. Many supporters asked how they could help us meet the need.

That's when friends from Jesuit High School came up with a plan to hold a sack lunch drive. Blanchet House could pass out the sack lunches during a meal service so the all-volunteer kitchen staff could catch their breath. From home, students packed brown bags with a sandwich, a piece of fruit, and a wrapped snack. They wrote uplifting notes on the sacks and decorated them.

Jesuit families made 15,000 sack lunches during that first drive, exceeding anyone's expectations. Soon, other schools held their own drives—Central Catholic, Lincoln, Catlin Gabel, Portland Jewish Academy, and more. We estimate 100,000 sack lunches have been made.



The response from our meal guests is overwhelmingly positive. We have many food insecure guests drive up in cars to take bags back to their families. The portable meals are easily stored and transported to the additional shelters we now serve.

"These bags are positive ripples in the pond, instead of all the negative things in our lives." Michael, a meal guest, said of the sack lunches.

Thank you to all of the schools, individuals, and groups who have helped us meet the need during this time. **Learn more about the sack lunch program and all the ways that you can safely assist Blanchet House during COVID-19 at [www.BlanchetHouse.org/Get-Involved](http://www.BlanchetHouse.org/Get-Involved).**

## New Board President

We are pleased to announce that Jerry Quinn has been elected as our board president.

Jerry, his wife Kristin, and their two sons are long-time volunteers and supporters, committed to furthering Blanchet House's mission.

"I am extremely honored,

excited, and inspired to take on the role of board president," Jerry says. "Blanchet House is needed more than ever due to the current pandemic."

With a career spanning over 25 years at Nike, Jerry has worked in various leadership positions including

his current role as Communications Director. He earned a bachelor's degree in economics from the University of Notre Dame and an MBA from Boston College's School of Management.

Jerry succeeds Emily Harrington who served as the board's president since 2018 and will remain on the board.





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# Let Them Know That You Care

Join us in fighting indifference to human suffering. Your support will truly make a lasting difference in the lives of the people we serve.



Guests wait in line for a hot meal at Blanchet House of Hospitality on March 25, 2020. (Photo by Jonathan Levinson/OPB)



We are serving up to 2,000 meals a day now.

I'm giving a one-time gift of: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

I'm giving a monthly gift of: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

In honor or memory of \_\_\_\_\_  
(circle one)

Who should we notify? \_\_\_\_\_

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Expires: \_\_\_ / \_\_\_ CVV# (back of card) \_\_\_

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[www.BlanchetHouse.org/Donate](http://www.BlanchetHouse.org/Donate)