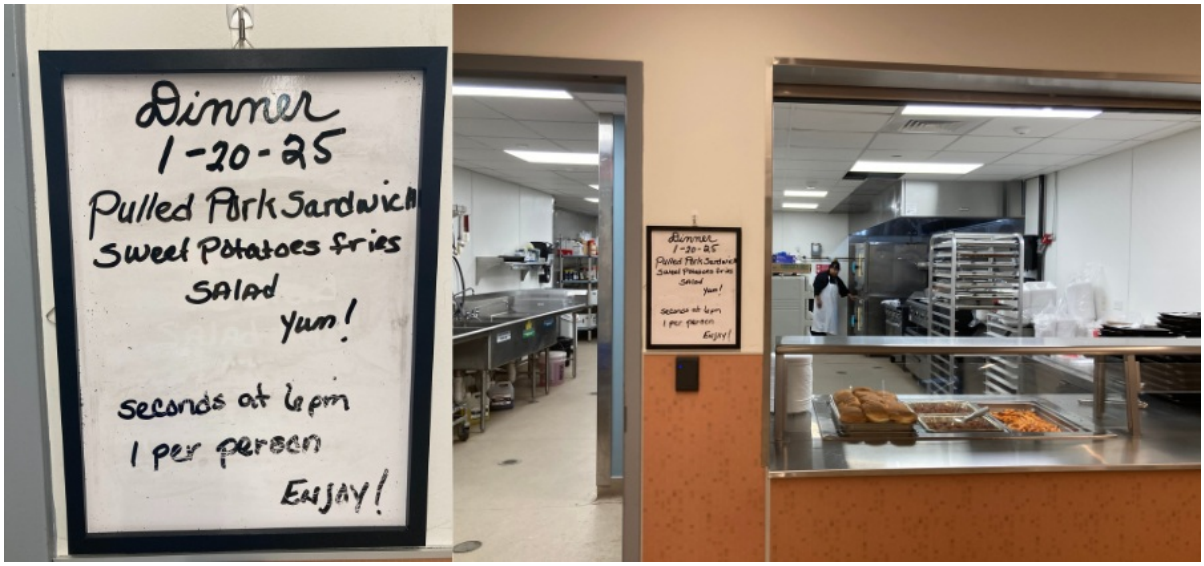
January 2025

DONOR Connection

PITTSBURGH MERCY
A HERITAGE OF HOPE

Dinner is served at Second Avenue Commons!



In October 2024, Pittsburgh Mercy staff and our persons-served returned to Second Avenue Commons (2AC) after being displaced for several months by a three-alarm fire in June. Freshly repaired and refinished, the building includes a state-of-the-art industrial kitchen and dining area on the first floor.

Eric Carter, kitchen manager and head chef at Second Avenue Commons, takes a moment out of his day to chat.

The reopening of 2AC also marked a new era of food satisfaction for a population who, outside of the shelter environment, often don't know when, where, or how they'll get their next meal.

Fortunately, the emergency shelter and overflow shelter guests can now enjoy two freshly prepared meals—breakfast and dinner—every day, straight from 2AC's renovated kitchen. Eric Carter, kitchen manager and head chef, keeps a rotating schedule of dozens of meals on the kitchen calendar, ranging from chicken tetrazzini and pasta with meatballs,

to pork chops and beef stew. Eric notes which meals are particularly popular so he can make them again soon. Every Friday, the meal is catered specifically to the vegetarian diet.

"We try to make everything as if they were at a five-star restaurant," Eric says of the kitchen staff. "If I'm not going to want to eat it, I'm not going to serve it to you.

"We put pride in what we do," Eric explains. "And that's what I like about it—they [the shelter guests] know they're getting good food, food that tastes good." Several residents told him he made the best meal they'd ever had.

As part of Pittsburgh Mercy's volunteer program, community members like Vivian, Micah, and Logan regularly volunteer their time to serve dinner at 2AC—providing an opportunity for volunteers and shelter guests to connect and giving the kitchen staff a chance to jump start kitchen prep for the next day.

Such high praise is heartening—and humbling, he says. Since he was little, he wanted to be a chef. "That's what I like to do, so I started as a dishwasher and moved on up."

In the 30-plus years he has been in the food service industry, he's never had a position quite so different—or so rewarding. "I had never worked with the shelter population before," he says, "but I like it. I find myself putting myself in their shoes. When I feed people here, there's gratitude. I want to make people smile with food."

Gradually, he and the kitchen staff get to know all the shelter guests. "We'll chit chat and talk about sports or what they did that day—getting jobs, getting their own place." In this way, Eric and his staff have become not just food providers, but part of the 2AC community. Because, Eric says, everyone deserves a good meal, regardless of their circumstances.

Eric's favorite thing to make? Meatloaf and mashed potatoes, what he calls the ultimate homestyle cooking. After residents polish off a plate of that hearty meal, they'll say, "'I'm ready to go to sleep now'," recalls Eric. "And because they're here [at 2AC], they actually have a place to do that—a place to rest, not out in the cold."

From left to right: Kathy enjoys a coloring project at Pittsburgh Mercy's Wexford Adult Training Facility (ATF). Phil takes a moment from lining up carts at his job at Giant Eagle to give two thumbs up. At her home, Deborah shows off her beautiful garden of potted plants.

Performance-based contracting to bring key benefits to those with intellectual and developmental disabilities

Quality of life is about to improve for those in Pittsburgh Mercy's Intellectual Developmental Disabilities Services (IDDS) residential programs, thanks to a new **performance-based contracting (PBC)** model. Pittsburgh Mercy is one of 390 IDDS service providers throughout Pennsylvania, and one of only 15 providers participating in this new model. We are proud to be in the top five percent approved to date.

PBC focuses on measurable, quality outcomes, while incentivizing cost efficiency and enhanced person-centered care. Providers are evaluated based on their ability to meet predefined performance metrics rather than merely delivering services. In addition, streamlined processes and data-driven decision-making will enhance service delivery.

This transition is more than a contractual shift—it's a commitment to making our system more sustainable by focusing on the following essential areas:

- **Continuum of residential services:** Choices like Life Sharing and Supported Living options are more flexible, cost less, make individuals and families happier, and usually need fewer staff compared to Residential Habilitation in a licensed community home.
- **Employment:** For those with disabilities, the benefits of a job are the same as for anyone else: greater independence and confidence, income, and community connections.
- **Technology:** For every client, Individual Support Plan (ISP) teams will explore technology solutions to support better health, safety, and greater independence.
- **Credentialing:** Improving our colleagues' skills through competency-based credentialing will improve client services as well as boost job satisfaction.
- **Workforce stability:** Tracking and sharing data on staff vacancy and turnover rates will allow us to better identify effective strategies for colleague retention.
- **Direct Support Professional (DSP) improvements:** Enhanced wages in a pay-for-performance system, along with better training, will drive retention and enable colleagues to serve individuals with more complex needs.

"This is an incredible accomplishment," said Tony Beltran, Pittsburgh Mercy President & CEO. "Our IDD colleagues continue to be leaders in this work, and moving to PBC

reaffirms our commitment to empowering those with intellectual and developmental disabilities, ensuring they lead fulfilling lives of independence and dignity."

For more information, contact **Michael Turk**, vice president of Community & Wellness.

2025 is the Year to Volunteer!

Why not make volunteering one of your New Year's resolutions? Giving of your time is a truly meaningful way to impact the lives of others. Consider these opportunities:

- Serving food at Second Avenue Commons.
- Hosting a sporting event watch party at a behavioral health residential program.
- Making arts and crafts at our adult day programs for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.
- Sorting donated clothing and basic hygiene supplies for people experiencing homelessness, housing insecurity, or other crises.

For more details or to sign up, contact Pittsburgh Mercy's Volunteer and Engagement Coordinator Brendan Copp at **Brendan.Copp@pittsburghmercy.org** or 412-897-8822.

Donate now and support the thousands of people in Pittsburgh Mercy's care.

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