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A Seat at the Table: Sharing a Family-Style Dinner at Thornwood

Tory Simpkins (left) and Gaye Posey, counselors in Pittsburgh Mercy's Intellectual and Developmental Services (IDDS) residential program, smile for the camera while preparing a family-style dinner with residents.

By Jody Figas, VP of Development, Pittsburgh Mercy

At Pittsburgh Mercy, we often talk about person-centered care. But every once in a while, we have the opportunity to *experience* it in the most genuine, unscripted way. That happened earlier this week, when I joined our Interim President, Jaime Dircksen, and our Mission Director, Bill Connolly, for a family-style dinner at Thornwood—one of our residential programs serving individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Thornwood is home to three remarkable women: Colleen, Darlene, and Robin. They live

together in a warm, welcoming space supported by equally remarkable Pittsburgh Mercy colleagues, including Tory Simpkins and Gaye Posey, who welcomed us into their home. With decades of service between them, Tory and Gaye don't just work at Thornwood—they help create a home where compassion, stability, and dignity are present in every detail.

Dinner that evening was more than a meal—it was an expression of trust and belonging. Over plates lovingly prepared by our hosts, we shared stories about family, jobs, summer plans, and personal memories. Darlene spoke about returning to her job after a short medical break. Colleen shared her excitement about upcoming travel with her family. Robin lit up when talking about her latest craft projects.

From left: Darlene and Colleen show off their beaded necklaces. Robin enjoys dinner.

We learned that Robin and Darlene have been roommates for decades and that Colleen welcomed them into her home three years ago. The bond they share is unmistakable—woven from shared routines, daily laughter, and mutual care.

What made the evening even more powerful were the reflections and wisdom that naturally emerged at the table. At one point, Gaye shared, *"When you are blessed and you don't share your blessings, you will lose them."* That mindset isn't just something Gaye and Tory bring to work—it's who they are. Both women spoke about how they've been deeply shaped by the blessings within their own families, and how the experiences of giving back to their loved ones have made them more empathetic, generous, and grounded. It's clear that their ability to care so deeply for the people we serve comes from a well of personal love and lived experience.

I left Thornwood with a full heart, reminded that the real spirit of Pittsburgh Mercy lives in places like this—in homes where people feel safe, supported, and genuinely cared for. And in colleagues like Tory and Gaye, who live our mission not just during work hours, but through the way they move through the world.

Learn more about Pittsburgh Mercy's Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Service on ***our website****.*

Helping Hands from Tenafly, NJ, Support Upcoming Pittsburgh Mercy Program

The air was abuzz on a hot summer day in June on the first floor of Pittsburgh Mercy's Reedsdale location, where the music of Bob Dylan, Fleetwood Mac, the Beatles, and Joan Baez pulsed from portable speakers while volunteers were busy taping and painting walls.

Their musical tastes belied the volunteers' ages: As part of a mission trip from Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Tenafly, New Jersey, the group of youths and young adults ranging from middle school through college were volunteering their time and energy to support various Pittsburgh-area charity and nonprofit programs. Thanks to the coordination of Pittsburgh Mercy's Volunteer and Engagement Coordinator Brendan Copp, the group of young people, led by a mission trip mentor, were recruited to take the first steps in helping to revamp an old space for the opening of a new, much-needed Pittsburgh Mercy program for children not much younger than the volunteers themselves.

Planned to open in Fall 2025, the Crisis Intervention-Residential for Children and Adolescents (CIRCA) Program is a new short-term, voluntary residential initiative designed to stabilize children ages 6 to 13 who are experiencing acute behavioral health crises. By offering an alternative to inpatient hospitalization—or a transitional step following one—CIRCA will help children and their families navigate moments of crisis with dignity, compassion, and evidence-based care.

Importantly, upon opening, CIRCA will be the only non-hospital-based residential crisis stabilization program for children ages 6 to 13 in the region. This makes it a critical and unique resource for families seeking timely, community-based support for their children during mental health emergencies.

But in order to facilitate a therapeutic environment for kids with acute behavioral health needs, the space, which had previously been home to a different Pittsburgh Mercy program, needs to be rejuvenated.

That's where our friends from Tenafly, New Jersey, came in to help kickstart these efforts. The goal? To create a more welcoming, non-institutional environment where children can feel safe, supported, and comfortable. This includes freshly painted walls, new furnishings in patient common areas, and supplies for therapeutic activities that promote engagement and healing.

These updates will help foster a setting that reflects the dignity and care we strive to provide to every child who walks through our doors.

A huge thank you to the hardworking mission group from Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Tenafly, New Jersey, for your compassion and enthusiasm for helping our region's youths and their families.

Mark your calendars for #ONEDAY Critical Needs Alert!

For #ONEDAY only, The Pittsburgh Foundation is hosting its Critical Needs Alert annual fundraiser in support of Pittsburgh Mercy's Operation Safety Net and our homeless services programs. Every year, more than 2,000 people turn to our homeless services for help meeting their basic needs. When you give on Tuesday, August 5, 2025, your gift will unlock a prorated matching donation from The Pittsburgh Foundation—providing even greater support to this vulnerable population.

Mark your calendars for August 5 and help Pittsburgh Mercy save lives.

Visit our #ONEDAY Webpage

Volunteer at Pittsburgh Mercy

At Pittsburgh Mercy, our volunteers provide a truly meaningful and enriching experience for community members in need. ***Thank you to our compassionate and inspiring volunteers!***

Would ***you*** like to make a difference in the lives of the thousands of people served by our programs? Pittsburgh Mercy offers numerous ways to get involved.

Consider these volunteer 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.
- Making PB&J sandwiches for persons served at Pittsburgh Mercy's Engagement Center at Second Avenue Commons.
- 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.

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Pittsburgh Mercy | 1200 Reedsdale St | Pittsburgh, PA 15233 US

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