



# Manna Matters

## PAYING IT FORWARD

### Mother/daughter team finds true riches through service to others

A favorite program at Manna Cafe is Mobile Pantry—a fast-moving, intense event during which the Manna staff and about 50 volunteers distribute 15 thousand pounds of food in just a few hours. The rule of thumb is “one box per household.” However, clients are allowed to pick up for a friend or neighbor as long as they present that person's ID. So it's not unusual for someone to pick up two or even three boxes. But when Debra and her mother, Brenda, pull up in their rickety red truck, we know it's time to rally the volunteers to help them load because this pair picks up a dozen boxes at a time. They've been at virtually every Mobile Pantry in the past few years, sometimes arriving at 4 a.m.

Recently, we spent a few minutes with this mother-daughter team to find out just where all those groceries go. It seems the ladies drive all the way from Tennessee Ridge so they can serve families not just in their own

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neighborhood but as far as Kentucky Lake. The deliveries take many hours to complete; though they're sometimes finished by 7 p.m., other delivery days don't end until 10 or 11 p.m. Deborah explains, "When you go to people's homes, they're so lonely, and they want someone to talk to. It's so hard to pull yourself away."

How do people respond when the ladies' overloaded pickup pulls up? "Oh, sweetie, some of the children—" Deborah begins; then Brenda continues, "—they get so happy to see us that they jump up and down."

"Sometimes the adults do the same thing," adds Deborah. "Some families don't have any food in the fridge or the cabinets, and they'll say, 'Ooooh, now we've got meat in the house!' It just breaks your heart."

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Have you had an experience while visiting or volunteering for Manna Cafe that you'd like to share?  
 Email [Vicki@MannaCafeMinistries.com](mailto:Vicki@MannaCafeMinistries.com) with your contact info, along with a brief description of your story. You just might end up on the front page of Manna Matters this year!

# THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

Introducing Operation Love Truck, a partnership between Manna Café and Sheepdog Initiative.

Spearheaded by Dustin Maxwell and his father Rodney, along with Shawna Spigner, the goal is to serve the homeless who live off the beaten path. Offering food, hygiene items, blankets, Sternos, and water—or simply a hug or an ear to listen—the program was brainchild of Dustin.

"About a year after leaving the military," he says, "there was an emptiness that began to come over me. Perhaps it was the reality finally setting in that I would never wear the uniform again, the absence of the brotherhood and camaraderie, or just a willingness to continue to serve. Regardless, the void was there and I didn't know quite how to fill it.

"My days often consisted of watching the news, thumbing through the social media world, and exchanging in meaningless debates about what is and what should be. Finally, I said, *Enough is enough—it's time to separate myself from the negativity and find a way to do good.* I decided to start being part of the solution instead of contributing to the problems. But I had no idea what to do or how to go about it."



One Saturday morning, Dustin's outlook shifted dramatically. "My sister Jamie invited me to serve breakfast with Manna Café. I'd be lying if I said I accomplished much

work—I did more observing than anything. I watched people stand in line for their meals, and I saw the smiles on their faces as they took their seats to break bread with their neighbors. I heard joy and laughter brought forth by [breakfast team leader] Mark's story, and I was

amazed at how something as simple as a warm meal and a conversation can make such a difference in someone's day."



From L to R: Dustin Maxwell, Shawna Spigner, Rodney Maxwell, and Kenny York.

As Dustin returned home, he was emotionally overwhelmed. "I'd found not only what I wanted to do, but what I believe I was *called* to do. I'd been given a way to serve and fill that awful void, so without hesitation Sheepdog Initiative was born. With the full support of my family and friends, we were packing snack and hygiene bags and passing them out to those in need by

week's end. I built my team with good people with big hearts. We simply try to find and fill the needs of our community any way we can. When Kenny extended the hand of Manna Café to us, we were beyond excited. To me, the partnership represents how community should be and also brings everything full circle: Sheepdog Initiative was conceived at a Manna breakfast, and now we've found ourselves in a coalition to assist those in need and build a better community."

## Sheepdog Initiative needs list:

- gloves
- propane
- blankets
- ball caps
- sun block
- bug spray
- toilet paper
- hand warmers
- small water bottles
- inexpensive sunglasses
- food, including snacks
- men's and women's sweatpants
- men's and women's socks and underwear
- hygiene items, e.g., body wash/wipes and deodorant

Items can be dropped off at Manna Cafe (1319 Franklin St.) or at TMS Construction (635 Frosty Morn Dr.).

# A WORD FROM KENNY: COMING IN FROM THE COLD

Now that you've been introduced to Operation Love Truck (OLT), I'll share a story. The idea behind OLT is to not only get supplies to our friends but also build trust and help people get off the streets. Meanwhile, when it's dangerously cold outside, Manna borrows various church buildings to create warming centers. OLT now goes to homeless camps to try to get the die-hard homeless to come inside. We call this "search and rescue."



One such night in January, after almost a week of asking a certain man (we'll call him Kris) to come inside, he finally agreed. He arrived at the warming

center in the middle of the night. He had ragged hair and a scraggly beard and wore so many layers of clothes that he appeared much larger than he really was. He smelled of body odor and old whiskey. Somewhere along the way Kris had lost his glasses, so our volunteers helped him fill out his paperwork, then got him warm, fed, and settled in. Soon he started taking off layers of clothes, but even when he got good and warm, there were still a few layers he never took off.

Just before Kris lay down on his cot, he walked over to me and asked if I was in charge. When I said yes, he thanked me for giving him a place to get warm. "It's been a while since I've slept inside," he said. "It's been very cold in my tent the last couple of nights, and I'd like to give you something. It's not much." He handed me a handmade multicolored bracelet. I thanked him, and instead of putting it in my pocket (as I normally would have), for some reason I put it on right there in front of him. A big smile

appeared on his face. He then lay down and got some rest.

Around 6 a.m., I was awakened by a volunteer who told me Kris had passed out and was having a seizure. By the time the ambulance arrived, the seizure had stopped, and Kris didn't want to go to the hospital. The paramedics left, but later that day he had another seizure and was hospitalized. When we checked on him at the hospital, we found out that his feet and toes had been black with severe frostbite. What we'd thought were seizures was actually Kris going into shock.

For several days, Kris fought for his life. As Manna volunteers and staff visited and prayed for him, he started to get better. Although the doctors had initially thought they'd have to amputate his feet, at last report he was possibly going to lose some toes.

I tell this story to illustrate why we do what we do. If the Love Truck team hadn't rescued Kris, and if Manna hadn't opened the center, he would have died that night. For most of us, the cold is just an inconvenience. We put on another layer of clothes and turn the heat up. But for some it's life or death. So as long as there's breath in my lungs, I'll be working on ways to help people be safe, warm, and off the streets. If someone sleeps outside, it should be because they want to, not because there's no place for them to go. This wristband is my reminder of how critical the need is.

Kris is still in the hospital for now. We've found out he has some family in a nearby town, and we're trying to locate them. Please pray for him and those just like him who are still on the streets.

Peace out.



## PAYING IT FORWARD, CONT'D.

Several months ago, the ladies found yet one more way to spread the wealth: they now pick up hundreds of



dozens of organic eggs from a local farmer and distribute them to not just needy families but also churches and organizations that distribute, including Manna Cafe. "We picked up 400 dozen just this week," says Deborah.

"With double yolks!" adds Brenda.

Clearly, the work can be exhausting—so why do they do it?

"It wears me out," admits Brenda, "but honey, it's such a blessing. Years ago, when my husband and I got married, he got hurt on the job and for a while we had to live in a tent and collect cans for money. But God is close to you when you go through the hard times, and suffering helps you have a bigger heart. God's been so good to me. Instead of brooding and thinking about myself, I think about those poor folks who don't have anyone."

Deborah's answer is short and to the point: "I want to put myself on the back burner and be more like Christ."

Mission accomplished.

## CALENDAR

### SAT.-SUN. MARCH 2&3

Food drives at all Clarksville Kroger stores

### SATURDAY, MARCH 9

Food drives at all Clarksville Walmart Neighborhood Markets

### SATURDAY, MARCH 16

Food drive at Hilltop Market &

Mobile Pantry at Living Hope Church: 225 Little Hope Church Rd.

### SATURDAY, MARCH 23

Food drives at all Clarksville Walmart Supercenters &

Mobile Pantry at Potter's Hand Church: 1546 Highway 79, Dover

### FRIDAY, APRIL 5

March Manna Madness celebration: burgers & dogs at Coldwell Banker: Conroy, Marable & Holleman on Riverside Dr. (11 am - 2 pm)

For a full list of weekly events, log on to [www.MannaCafeMinistries.com](http://www.MannaCafeMinistries.com).



### MANNA VILLAGE UPDATE:

We've broken ground! Site and building permits have been received. Fire suppression is in design. Interior demolition, storm water management, and rough grading and base stone have been done. Interior plumbing and exterior utilities, as well as electrical rough-in will have begun by the time you read this!

There's lots and lots of work ahead of us. We need builders, electricians, and other skilled workers. We need materials—everything from lumber to paint.

And of course we need funds. Be part of the solution to poverty in Clarksville by lending a hand. Contact us at [TheVillage@MannaCafeMinistries.com](mailto:TheVillage@MannaCafeMinistries.com).

## MANNA CAFE MISSION STATEMENT

Manna Café Ministries serves people in need in Clarksville/Montgomery County through a soup kitchen on wheels, food box distribution, and other vital resources. Propelled chiefly by volunteers, Manna Café strives to restore hope, dignity, self-reliance, community, and the love of God through Jesus Christ.

