

NIAGARA NEWS

Things cooking again for Niagara man's food recovery kitchen

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Craig Adams collects unused food from restaurants and other sources that would have otherwise ended up in landfills in order to make home-cooked meals for food-insecure communities. His endeavour was in jeopardy after he was visited by public health inspectors.



Craig Adams has been able to move forward with kitchen renovations that allow him to continue his food-recovery program.

Matthew P. Barker/St. Catharines Standard

Craig Adams' business of caring for people who need a hearty meal should be, well, mushrooming again.

The owner of Fresh Niagara Mushrooms has received an outpouring of community support for his food recovery program following a public health inspection last month that required him to undergo costly kitchen renovations if he wished to continue to feed unhoused and food-insecure people.

Over the past year and a half, Adams has been collecting unused food from Niagara restaurants and other sources that would have otherwise ended up in landfills. The food is used to make home-cooked meals for food-insecure communities.

He tracks everything coming in and out of his St. Catharines kitchen, including cost per plate and holding temperatures.

But inspectors outlined areas he needed to address to meet health standards for preparing food, amounting to nearly \$12,000 for new equipment and licensed contractors to do the installation.

"I never thought we could raise enough money to end up with a commercial dishwasher and a dedicated hand-wash sink," Adams said.

But within two weeks of his plight being reported in the paper, he had more than \$7,000 and a sizeable gift from St. Catharines business Lifco Hydraulics, which said it would help with purchasing the items he needed.

Adams said this all means food will continue to get to people who need it, and avoid the landfill.

"I went from feeling as insecure as somebody living in a tent, thinking I wouldn't be able to bring them food, upset, angry," to being able to keep going, he said.

Lifco president Fraser Berkhout spoke on what prompted him to reach out to Adams and his program.

"It seemed effective, efficient and good-natured, so (as) a very hungry guy myself, I thought it was an opportunity to help," he said.

"I do not have the time to help with labour, but I can help with capital."

Berkhout said he prefers helping smaller organizations operating independently — especially ones showing impacts in the community.

“I got the opportunity to look under the hood (of Adams’ operation),” he said.

“In this case, I had him bring me the documentation ... basically, proving this is legit, and he came back to me with all of the paperwork.”

It left Berkhout feeling good — as he described it, “almost (like) helping your neighbour out, which made it so effective ... opposed to just a faceless charity.”



With the support of recent donors, Craig Adams can continue to spare food destined for landfill to prepare home-cooked meals in his St.

Catharines kitchen for food-insecure people.
Matthew P. Barker/St. Catharines Standard

In the last two weeks of February, Adams recovered more than 7,000 meals or about 1,700 kilograms of food, which he said retailed for nearly \$19,000, but had a social impact of more than \$66,000.

“The recovery stream includes both food and essential non-food items (hygiene products, clothing, containers), increasing real-world impact beyond just meals,” he said.

“It’s so mind-blowing when they say a penny of prevention is worth a pound of cure, it’s so true,” he said.

George Myers, president of The Community Family Foundation, which distributes meals to encampments, said food-insecure families and unhoused people needing food assistance would suffer greatly if Adams’ meals stopped coming.

“It’s everything — without him making the food, we couldn’t do our handouts to the encampments and the struggling families,” he said.

“It’s absolutely crucial he keeps that going. So, it’s great somebody stepped up and helped him get the proper appliances (to) keep doing it.”



Matthew P. Barker is a St. Catharines-based general assignment reporter for the Standard.