

Harvesting Harmony



From The Director's Desk:

As we enter the holiday season and see the ubiquitous *#Blessed* and *Be Grateful* signs displayed on everything from social media posts to home décor, at the Thomas Merton Center, being thankful is simply part of the culture each and every day. From the guests enjoying a warm meal or hot shower, to the staff who know that without our dedicated brigade of volunteers and generous donors none of what happens at TMC would be achievable, we recognize all the blessings that make our home at 43 Madison Avenue possible. Each morning as I walk through the doors of TMC and see my hardworking staff, caring volunteers, and grateful guests, I am reminded of how blessed I am to be part of the TMC mission.

However, there is one special person at TMC who took his gratitude to the next level and put it into action. Emilio started coming to TMC several years ago as a guest. He would come in for breakfast and lunch during the times he found himself unemployed. In addition, he would receive support from a TMC staff member. Emilio worked through many life challenges, nevertheless he never gave up and always kept faith that his life would change. And it did.

Through the support he received from TMC, Emilio was able to overcome his struggles and secure steady employment as a landscaper. He has been employed for the last few years and has succeeded in turning his life around. However, he recently returned to TMC.

This time Emilio walked through our doors not needing a meal or shower, but instead to make a donation of \$500 to the program that fed him when he was hungry and provided a hand when he needed it, to the program that helped him find his way again. He wanted to pay it forward for the next individual who finds himself on hard times.

Emilio, it is an honor to accept your donation and to assure you that because of your generosity, another guest will be given a warm meal, a hot shower, a bag of groceries, and loving hand of support in their darkest hour. You are a reflection of the spirit of the Thomas Merton Center and it is truly a privilege to share your story. No matter where you go in life, you will always be part of the Thomas Merton Center family.

And to all of the Thomas Merton Center friends, volunteers, donors, and guests, on behalf of me and my staff, thank you for all you do to enable us to serve our beloved Bridgeport family. I hope you and your loved ones enjoy a wonderful holiday season!

— Bill Colson

Director of The Thomas Merton Center



Bill Colson and Emilio with his donation

Our Volunteers *Making a Difference*

Dedicated volunteers form the heart of The Thomas Merton Center's outreach. Bob and Carol, a husband and wife team, exemplify this commitment. Their TMC journey began when Bob heard about us through a fellow volunteer during his time at Habitat for Humanity. Intrigued by our mission, Bob and Carol decided to pay us a visit and for the past two years they have both been a steadfast presence in our food pantry market, dedicating one day every week to serve our community.

Bob highlighted, "TMC alleviates a significant burden for those facing hardship by providing essential food stability. It's fulfilling to make a meaningful difference." Carol echoed this sentiment, "TMC feels like family. Our commitment extends not only to helping those in need, but also to our incredible volunteer and staff community."

Lately, Bob has found a unique way in supporting TMC. Through his hobby as a skilled woodworker, Bob delved into the art of woodturning and has crafted exquisite bowls. As people began insisting on paying Bob for his beautiful works of art, he would graciously donate all the proceeds to TMC.

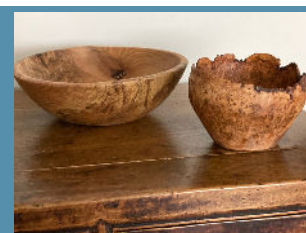
Bob and Carol's story is a perfect example of the transformative impact of dedicated volunteers at TMC and their creative and heartfelt way of giving back and supporting our mission!



Bob and Carol in our Eat Smart Food Pantry



Bob woodturning



Bowls crafted by Bob

Young Advocates

At The Thomas Merton Center we are always impressed with our youngest contingent of supporters and wanted to share the beautiful stories of our friends Sammy, Emily, Grace & Michael. They illustrate that even the littlest hearts can have a big impact!



Sammy

Meet our compassionate 6 year-old friend Sammy. Sammy's contribution to the Thomas Merton Center began when he crossed paths with TMC Volunteer Coordinator Karen Frissora during a summer camping trip. The conversation kicked-off with Sammy asking "Where do you work?" Karen shared that she worked at TMC and explained how TMC feeds hungry men, women, and children in Bridgeport. Sammy's eyes lit up as he jumped out of his hammock and announced that he wanted to help. He proudly presented Karen with a Canadian quarter and asked her to share it with the families of Bridgeport who needed help buying groceries.

Honoring the wishes of her young donor, Karen purchased several items for our pantry and made sure Sammy knew how much the families would appreciate his generosity.

Thank you, Sammy, for your big heart!

The Toolan siblings are no strangers to TMC. They have been supporting our mission for several years by assembling snack bags for our dining hall guests. Each bag is lovingly put together by 14-year old twins Emily and Michael and 8-year old Grace.

Following in their parents' footsteps in giving back, this amazing trio packages snack bags throughout the year for TMC to handout to guests as they leave in the afternoon. Often times these bags are the only food someone may have until they return to TMC in the morning for breakfast, or it's a little something to help them get through the weekend.

Whether it's fruit, granola bars, or cookies, these bags are packed with love and compassion. Thank you Emily, Grace, and Michael for being such incredible friends to the guests of the Thomas Merton Center!



Emily, Grace and Michael



Merton Moments



Fredy and Case Manager Daisy Rodriguez

Meet Hector Fredy Sanchez- Guerrero. Fredy arrived in the United States from Columbia in 2022. Born and educated in Chile, he was forced to leave his homeland because of gang violence. Before he embarked on the terrifying and dangerous journey to safety, he secured a job and arranged living accommodations in the United States.

However, a few months after arriving in this country, he was informed by his employer that his services were no longer needed. Before long, he was homeless and living out of a car in Bridgeport. Things were not going according to plan.

Then Fredy found the Thomas Merton Center. He started coming for breakfast, lunch, and showers. Eventually, he began working with a case manager to assist him with navigating the complex system of resources available to immigrants. And although Fredy is not proficient in English, he does not let that hinder him from doing everything in his power to change his situation. He travels to Stamford on Metro-North every day to work on the maintenance crew at the Stamford Mall. Once his shift is over, he is back on the train to Bridgeport to sleep in his car, only to be followed by doing it all over again the next day.

What makes Hector Fredy Sanchez-Guerrero different from many of our guests is that he has earned a bachelor's degree in Education in his native country. His employment experience included working as a computer analyst and the director of an adult school in Chile.

Despite the setbacks and challenges, Fredy remains optimistic that his situation will change through perseverance, hard work, and faith for a more stable future. He says he has learned humility through this experience and recognizes that if it is this difficult for someone who is educated, it's even that more challenging for others. Fredy has been a supportive friend to fellow TMC guests who find themselves in similar situations, offering advice garnered from his own experience. Through it all he never complains and is always grateful for the help he receives from The Thomas Merton Center.

Fredy is an example of how anyone's life can change and you never know when you are going to find yourself on the other side of someone's generosity. With a smile on his face and gratefulness in his eyes, Fredy puts one foot in front of the other and keeps up the good fight to get to the other side of this period in his life. Like many of our guests, we are confident that our services will only be needed for a period of time in Fredy's life. Between his desire to work and change his circumstances, coupled with the services he is receiving at TMC, there is no doubt Fredy will rise out of this dark moment and on to brighter days.

And we at TMC know that those brighter days are a result of all the support we receive from our volunteers and donors who believe in our mission. On behalf of all the Fredy's out there, thank you for having faith in us to provide for our neighbors in need.

This past July, TMC Case Manager Craig Budnick had the privilege of traveling with three of our guests experiencing homelessness for a two-day retreat in bucolic Vermont.

The men were hosted by the Mercy Eco-spirituality Center in Benson and enjoyed time working the land, soaking in nature, and bonding with one another. From tending to the gardens and feeding the animals, to delivering produce to a local food pantry, the men gained a much needed renewed sense of purpose and a refresh of their spirit.

The reprieve from the stresses of living on the streets was certainly good for the soul and an experience that granted them peace in their otherwise chaotic world.

Thank you to the Sisters of Mercy for opening their beautiful retreat center to the TMC family and allowing us to share in God's gift of nature!



Case Manager Craig Budnick with three guests in Vermont



Our new address!

Add our new address to your records!

Stay tuned for updates and information about our new home.

DAVID W. BLAGYS GYMNASIUM



Dave Blagys and Kathleen Pierce with TMC Director Bill Colson

Thomas Merton Center is thrilled to congratulate our Advisory Council Member Dave Blagys on the naming of the new Wakeman Boys & Girls Club Gym in his honor.

Dave has been a champion for the Bridgeport community and this tribute is most well deserved!

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