



# CATHEDRAL KITCHEN

NEWSLETTER

ISSUE #01  
2026



Guests line up outside of Cathedral Kitchen's first building

Dear Friends,

In 1976, four young residents of Camden were inspired to serve people experiencing food insecurity. They began serving soup and sandwiches through a Camden church to neighbors in need. By our 25th anniversary, Cathedral Kitchen was serving more than 7,000 meals a month. Today, we are the largest emergency meal provider in Southern New Jersey. We serve over 28,000 meals each month, distribute free groceries and personal care products, provide comprehensive case management and access to healthcare, benefits, housing services, and social supports, offer a free Culinary Arts Training program, and operate a social enterprise that provides jobs to Camden residents.

This June, we celebrate our 50th year of service. Though much has changed, the core values instilled by our founders remain: dignity, love, respect, and solidarity. These values, along with the unwavering support of thousands of volunteers and partners, have carried us through challenging times—recessions, global conflict, and a pandemic. Our commitment to Camden has never wavered, and there is still much work ahead as our community faces rising costs for basic needs and increasing strain on vital safety net programs.

That commitment was especially evident this past January, when Cathedral Kitchen was proud to serve as an emergency warming center during an extreme cold snap. We partnered with Rowan University, Rutgers Camden Joint Board of Governors, and Camden County Board of Commissioners to provide a safe place for our neighbors. Over two weeks, 133 individuals stayed with us—20% of whom were over the age of 60. In addition to shelter, we distributed 435 essential items such as blankets, clothing, socks, and personal hygiene products. While we are glad the cold is behind us, we are proud to have stepped up in this meaningful way for our community.

Our gratitude for our volunteers, service partners, and funders is immeasurable. Because of you, Cathedral Kitchen has been a beacon of hope for 50 years. In 2026, it's time to celebrate.

Throughout this year, we will host special events and volunteer opportunities to honor this milestone, reflect on all we have accomplished together, and look ahead to an inspiring future. We hope you will join us.

The Campbell's Company has already been working behind the scenes to design our newly unveiled 50th anniversary logo. The design features a refreshed font while retaining our signature blue. A path element reflects our mission to help create a path toward stability and opportunity, and the mosaic—drawn from the mosaic on our building—represents the many pieces that come together to make Cathedral Kitchen what it is today: our guests, students, volunteers, staff, donors, and partners.

For all that is Cathedral Kitchen, we thank you.

Carrie Kitchen-Santiago  
CEO/President

**Since 1976, Cathedral Kitchen has served more than 10 million free meals to Camden and the surrounding community**

# Celebrate 50 Years by Becoming a CK Ambassador

## Cathedral Kitchen

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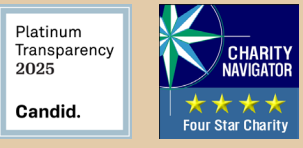
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**President/CEO**  
 Carrie Kitchen-Santiago

Founded in 1976, the Cathedral Kitchen is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

**Mission Statement**  
 Cathedral Kitchen's mission is to help people out of food insecurity and champion their pursuit of stability and prosperity.

**Cathedral Kitchen**  
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 Camden, NJ 08105  
 T: (856) 964-6771  
 F: (856) 964-6772  
 www.cathedralkitchen.org



A member of



The Ambassador Program is open to all volunteers and former board members. Help us engage new partners through creative "50 ways to help" opportunities – donate 50 sandwiches, volunteer 50 hours with your book club, encourage 50 friends to donate – the ideas are endless! Ambassadors will introduce Cathedral Kitchen at local businesses, civic groups, churches, synagogues, book clubs, retirement communities, and more to share inspiring stories of our work, testimony about volunteering, and ways they can participate.

Contact Anna Marchessault at [anna@cedralkitchen.org](mailto:anna@cedralkitchen.org) or 856-964-6771 x129 for more information.



Left top: St. Simon Stock members learn about CK  
 Bottom: St. Joseph's makes sandwiches for CK

## Welcome to the CK Team!



CK is pleased to welcome Chris D'Agostino as our Vice President of Operations. A South Philadelphia native, Chris brings 35 years of restaurant management experience, with a background spanning back-of-house (BOH), front-of-house (FOH), and leadership roles. Most recently, Chris worked in restaurant consulting. At CK, he oversees kitchen operations for both our meal program and catering services, and is excited to advance our mission of supporting food security for our neighbors.

## Leave a Legacy



Cathedral Kitchen has served Camden and the community since 1976, welcoming neighbors with dignity and helping people move toward stability and prosperity. A planned gift is a simple way to ensure this work continues for generations.

**Cathedral Soup Kitchen, Inc. • Tax ID #: 22-3114500**

Please let us know if you have already included Cathedral Kitchen in your estate plans. For more information, please contact Noreen Flewelling at (856) 964-6771 ext. 126 or [noreen@cedralkitchen.org](mailto:noreen@cedralkitchen.org).

# Thank you Alex!



*Alex, Chef Jonathan, and a meal guest*

After 16 years with Cathedral Kitchen (CK), Community Relations Director Alex Wills is retiring. Her commitment to CK, our guests, and our volunteers cannot be overstated. While we will miss her deeply, we are excited for her to enjoy this next chapter, spending more time with her family.

Alex first learned about CK through her children's school community service. As a service-minded person and a member of the Voorhees Breakfast Rotary Club, Alex was committed to Cathedral Kitchen's mission before she set foot in the building as an employee.

As she took on increasing responsibilities as a volunteer, Alex stepped into a role managing volunteers—first part-time, then full-time—eventually coordinating the thousands of individuals who give their time to CK each year. Along the way, she built genuine, lasting relationships with many of them.

"I love the volunteers, I have made real friendships here. It's more than just camaraderie, it's like an extended family."

Alex will still be involved at CK post-retirement and hopes to keep up many of the relationships she built here. She takes pride in keeping up with the lives of volunteers and guests alike—their milestones, celebrations, and even their losses. One loss, in particular, profoundly impacted the CK community during her time here.

"When we lost Chef Jonathon, all our hearts broke," she said. "He had a larger-than-life personality and made such a big impact. We carry his legacy with us in the Kitchen and in our lives."

Beyond the relationships she built, Alex's favorite part of her job was the variety. "Each day is something different. You never know what a day will bring when you walk in the door," she said. She recalled one especially heartwarming day when a guest proposed to his partner right in the dining room—and she said yes!

Since she joined CK in 2010, the team has witnessed tremendous growth. Our social services and personal care closet, in particular, have grown to help our guests in ways that food alone couldn't.

Alex was also instrumental in building a network of partner agencies and companies. She recognized that the partners' goals are the same: to help people. And because no one organization can do everything on its own, we all show up for one another and work together to make the greatest impact possible.



*Alex lending a hand during meal service*



*Alex and CK staff celebrate her last day*

"It takes a village, but I like to think that my work made a difference and the relationships I fostered benefitted CK and our guests."

Alex would be the last person to boast, but we can say definitively that her dedication and humility perfectly reflect the spirit of CK and the community we strive to build.

During her retirement, Alex looks forward to spending more time with her husband, her three children, and her eight grandchildren. She's also excited to finally learn Mahjong, which she has wanted to do for years.

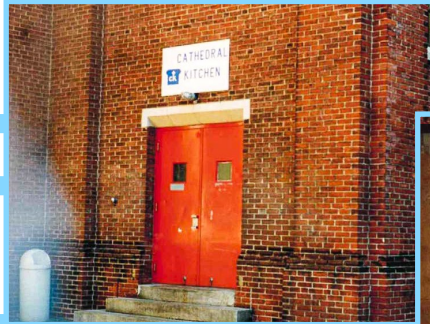
"I'm a hugger now! It's not that I wasn't nice before, but since working here with all the kind and genuine people, I see how those small gestures matter. So now, I'm a hugger."

# 50 Years of Cathedral Kitchen



## 1976

Cathedral Kitchen was founded in June of 1976 by four Camden residents.



## 2003

Karen Talarico, CK's first Executive Director, was hired.



## 2008

CK operations moved to a permanent home at 1514 Federal Street.



## 2013

CK Catering From the Heart was launched, offering delicious catered food for community members and providing additional funding for our programs.



## 2021

Empowerment services officially established for guests to take advantage of. Marketstand groceries and personal care services launched to further support guests.



# CATHEDRAL KITCHEN

Cathedral Kitchen has been serving the Camden community for 50 years – but we haven't always looked like we do today! Take a walk through memory lane with us to remember where we came from, celebrate how we've grown, and plan for what's to come next.



## 1980s

As CK grew, volunteers were tasked with making casseroles in their own space and bringing them to the daily meal service to serve.



## 1991

Mom and Pop Jones joined the CK team as the first employees, in charge of cooking and managing meal service.



## 2009

Culinary Arts Training program was established under Chef Jonathon. CK began working with partners to provide on-site services such as healthcare, insurance, and other free programs.



## 2015

CK bought the building next door to house our social enterprise operation. Volunteers of America awarded CK a contract to prepare 1,800 meals daily.



## 2020

During COVID, CK kept operations open throughout the pandemic by offering to-go meals. This option is still available for guests in addition to dining room service.



## 2026

In 50 years, CK has served 10 million meals to our Camden neighbors and graduated more than 600 Culinary Arts Training students.

Kelly has been coming to Cathedral Kitchen four to five days a week for two years with her children, Connie and Ashton. The family loves coming for the meals, groceries, and personal care items. They especially look forward to Wednesdays when Connie and Ashton can get books from the Free Books Project, one of our weekly partners. Connie has been on a James Patterson kick, and Ashton loves all things Stephen King. They're such avid readers that Tom, the director of the Free Books Project, will save books he thinks the kids will like for their next visit.



*Kelly and Connie at CK's meal service*

Living in Woodbury without a nearby support system and unable to drive, Kelly relies on Access Link transportation to make the trip. She manages multiple chronic illnesses stemming from undiagnosed Lyme disease in childhood, along with the demands of caring for her daughter, who has autism, and managing many doctors' appointments. These challenges have made steady employment nearly impossible. The family lives on just \$890 a month in Social Security Income. Kelly regularly makes hard choices between necessities. Cathedral Kitchen's meals mean keeping the lights on—literally.

"I make sure the food at home is for the kids, so a lot of the time, this meal at Cathedral Kitchen is the only time I eat in the day. The meal, snack bag, and groceries are extremely helpful."

Even so, Kelly is hesitant to ask for more. "I have a roof over my head; I don't want to take away from someone who needs services more."

Like many guests, she puts others before herself. With encouragement, she's considering using our Empowerment Services to help her daughter obtain a state ID—something she's struggled to navigate alone.

In addition to the meals and groceries, CK is an important social resource. Kelly met her best friend here, who she describes as chosen family. The routine of coming to Cathedral Kitchen also helps push her to shower and get out of the house, especially when she's struggling with her mental health.

"It seems small, but when I walk in, they know me by name. It feels nice to know there are friendly people, you're always welcome, and you're wanted."

Meals are just the beginning of what makes Cathedral Kitchen special for Kelly. It has become a place of community where she feels safe, welcomed, and happy.

## CK Catering from the Heart



Planning a party or event? Look no further than **CK Catering from the Heart!**

Our Culinary Chefs create a mouthwatering menu that suits your needs and budget, and our friendly, professional staff makes sure your event is flawless!

Named **Best Mission-Driven Catering** by the 2023 and 2025 **Best of SJ Magazine**.

Contact Lisa Marco or scan the QR code to begin your planning today! 856-964-6771 x101





*Anthony working CK's Harvest for Hunger*

"I would not be where I am today if it weren't for Cathedral Kitchen."

Chef Anthony Aponte's journey to the kitchen didn't begin with a passion for food; it began with a second chance and a community.

Growing up in Cape May, NJ, Anthony made some mistakes in his early years that led to a seven-year period of incarceration. As he neared the end of his sentence, he transitioned to a halfway house, where he was required to complete community service. That requirement ultimately led him to Cathedral Kitchen.

"Being away that long is isolating. I was a little anti-social," Anthony shared. "But the way Chef Jonathon pushed me, had faith in me, and had me explaining my dishes helped bring me out of it."

Anthony continued volunteering at Cathedral Kitchen for over a year, building relationships with staff, volunteers, and guests. Encouraged by Chef Jonathon and the team, Anthony enrolled in Cathedral Kitchen's Culinary Arts Training (CAT) program after completing his community service.

"There is no program like Cathedral Kitchen's Culinary Arts Training program," he said. "I don't know of a program that could give even close to the same amount of support and care that students receive through that program."

Once in the program, Anthony was all in. He was constantly watching cooking videos, experimenting with recipes, and refining his skills outside the classroom. With determination, talent, and the support of the CAT program behind him, he thrived.

Anthony graduated as valedictorian of his class. Then, Anthony returned to Cathedral Kitchen in a new role: first as a cook and, after several promotions, Executive Sous Chef. For eight years, he worked alongside Chef Jonathon and the CAT students, mentoring others just as he had once been mentored.

"My purpose as a chef is to help and to give back. Just a conversation can save someone's life, and I want to provide that."



*Teaching Culinary Arts Training students*



*Today, Anthony is the owner of Maria Station Cafe, a growing culinary business in Gloucester City*

Today, Anthony is the proud owner of Maria Station Cafe, a growing culinary business located in Gloucester City, named in honor of his late mother. What started as a dream has become a thriving operation that includes a food truck, a brick-and-mortar restaurant, catering, and contract services—diversification inspired by the programs here at CK. Of the six employees at Maria Station, four are graduates of Cathedral Kitchen's CAT program.

"I know how discouraged you can feel trying to start over, but keep trying. There is no such thing as failure. I put in effort day in and day out, and now I'm living a life I never would have imagined for myself back then."

We're thrilled to welcome him back on June 20th for our 50th Anniversary Community Celebration, where he'll be serving food from the Maria Station food truck—a full-circle moment for a chef whose journey began right here at Cathedral Kitchen.



## **50th Anniversary Community Celebration** **Saturday, June 20, 12 – 3PM**

This free, family-friendly community event kicks off our year of celebrations. Expect a delicious BBQ, music, games, prizes, a selection of our partnering service providers, groceries and personal care items, and, the mayor! Meal guests, students, alumni... the whole Camden community is welcome to join us!

## **Golden Harvest** **Thursday, November 12 at Lucien's in Berlin, NJ**

Our largest annual fundraiser of the year! Golden Harvest will celebrate the impact you've helped make possible while looking ahead to our vision for the future and the next chapter of CK. Guests can still look forward to Harvest event favorites: wine and craft beer tastings, gourmet food, live and silent auction, and raffles, but with the addition of special touches to honor five decades of using food to change lives.



**Sponsorships are now available!** For more information, scan the QR code or go to [www.ckgoldenharvest.givesmart.com](http://www.ckgoldenharvest.givesmart.com)



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