



## Frontline Foods Fuels the Fight Against COVID-19

Frontline Foods delivers meals from local restaurants to our health care heroes.

BY JENNIFER BROZAK

**W**hile health care workers are caring for patients on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic, one community organization wants to make sure that hospital employees are being cared for, too—all while supporting local restaurants that have been impacted by state shelter-in-place measures.

Here in Pittsburgh and in cities throughout the country, this call is being answered by Frontline Foods, a national organization dedicated to supporting health care workers at local hospitals by partnering with local restaurants.

In this region, the effort is being championed by Anne Kelly, the city lead for Frontline's Pittsburgh chapter. A California native and a producer of large-scale events for corporate clients, Kelly moved to Pittsburgh in February, just before the pandemic began to spread across the country. With the project that she had been working on—the Tokyo Olympics—postponed, she suddenly found herself with unexpected time on her hands. She reached out to friends back in San Francisco, and learned of an effort to deliver pizza to a pediatric nurse at UCSF. Through donations from the community, the pizza shop could prepare and deliver pizzas to health care workers.

“As I was coordinating that for people who were 2,500 miles away, it got me wondering if anyone was organizing something like that in Pittsburgh,” Kelly explains. “At the time, the answer seemed to be no, so I emailed the 11 people I

knew in Pittsburgh with this idea to create a website that would be a list of restaurants that were seeking donations, and a list of hospitals that were inviting donated deliveries.”

While Kelly and her team of volunteers were organizing, they learned about Frontline Foods, which had launched in San Francisco the week of March 16. The group was impressed with the way Frontline was tackling the problem, and inspired by the organization’s partnership with chef José Andrés’ crisis response nonprofit, World Central Kitchen.

“We decided it was a good idea to hitch our wagon to a larger effort, rather than competing or potentially diluting the effort by trying to ‘go it alone,’” Kelly says. “We knew we could have more impact, because the World Central Kitchen partnership means literally every dollar that is donated is tax-deductible and goes directly into Pittsburgh restaurants.”

The group launched the Pittsburgh chapter of Frontline Foods on April 1. As of press time, the all-volunteer organization—with members from all areas that surround the Greater Pittsburgh area—had served more than 2,000 meals to workers at nearly a dozen local hospitals.

“Without a doubt, Pittsburgh has some of the finest hospital systems in the entire country, so we’ve been kept plenty busy just fueling Allegheny Health Network and UPMC hospitals,” Kelly adds. “We have incredible partners in both of those organizations who have helped run ‘air traffic control’ to ensure the meals are distributed based on need and in an equitable way. All hospitals in Allegheny County are on the front line of the COVID-19 crisis, and we’ve been trying to serve as many of them as consistently as our fundraising allows.”

It’s important to note that Frontline Foods is not just serving clinicians. Rather, it is also sending meals to lab technicians, testing sites, and custodial crews who clean the hospitals.

“All of them are vital parts of this ecosystem and deserve to be recognized,” Kelly says.

The meals are coming from restaurants from all over the city, making up what she calls a broad cross-section of the Pittsburgh food scene.

“We’re working with local and independently owned restaurants that truly

comprise the cultural fabric of this city, and these are restaurants that already have an incredible track record of giving back to the community,” she says.

One of those restaurants is *Salúd Juicery*, which had already been donating smoothies to health care workers in the Oakland area. In the third week of donating, owners Sheronica and Mayan Marshall met Kelly, and began to partner with Frontline Foods.

“An idea that started with a conversation between three friends blossomed into a partnership with Frontline Foods,” says Sheronica. “We believe there is a blessing in community, Psalm 133, and we’re honored to serve along Frontline Foods in Pittsburgh.”



*Salúd Juicery* has been delivering a variety of three juices to health care workers, including a green juice called “Smiling Irish,” a fruit juice called “Jane Goodall,” and a third pomegranate-based juice called “Pom cha-cha.” To date, the team has delivered more than 450 fresh-pressed juices to local health care workers.

“These three juices were selected because they provide the health benefits of energy, mental focus and immunity, plus they pair very well with brunch,” explains Sheronica. “Our team of three at *Salúd Juicery* in Oakland is grateful for this opportunity to give back to our community!”

Above & Beyond Catering, based in the South Hills, also is contributing to the fight. To date, owners Nicole Payne and Monica Ruvolo have delivered 250 health-conscious, culturally diverse meals to local health care workers.

“We’re trying to provide healthy, flavorful meals to the hospitals that are a little different from the typical ‘take-out’ routine,”

says Ruvolo. “Playing a part in providing meals to all of the medical personnel working on the front lines is the most rewarding part of this experience.”

“All of our interactions with the folks at Frontline have been so positive,” adds Payne. “They truly are a wonderful group of people and it shows with all of the work they’re doing for our community. We couldn’t be happier to be working with them on this project.”

Frontline Foods asks that the donated meals be healthy and nourishing. Restaurants typically provide a complete meal of a protein, starch and vegetable, and 30 percent of the order is vegetarian, says Kelly.

“The last thing we need is our health care workers crashing during their shift,” she explains. “These are restaurant-quality meals that any of us would be glad to have in front of us.”

Kelly adds that the utmost attention is given to safety while preparing and packaging the meals. Restaurants are asked to conduct health screenings of employees before they begin to prepare food. Meals are cooked to temperature, packaged into individual single-serving containers, and then refrigerated so that they can be reheated at the convenience of the health care workers.

Even as the COVID-19 pandemic begins to wane, the group will stay focused on the mission of feeding heroes on the front line while at the same time supporting local restaurants.

“We can’t really see far ahead enough into a post-COVID-19 world to know for certain,” Kelly explains. “But what we do know is that the economic ramifications of this crisis may be with us for much longer than the disease itself, and the need on the restaurant side is not going away any time soon.”

“We wish we could throw a life preserver to every single restaurant that reaches out to us,” she adds. “We wish we could feed every health care worker in Allegheny County every meal every day, because these people deserve infinite appreciation for the risk they’ve taken on in their profession.”

Anyone who is interested in contributing to Frontline Foods can visit [frontlinefoods.org/Pittsburgh](http://frontlinefoods.org/Pittsburgh) to learn more. ■