

THE FRANCISCAN CENTER FOR SOCIAL CONCERN
 at St. Bonaventure University
 Franciscan Center for Social Concern
 3261 W. State Road
 P.O. Box AR
 St. Bonaventure, NY 14778

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3261 W. State Road
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the Warming House

COMMUNITY • DIGNITY • NOURISHMENT

Spring 2024

Our Warming House Guests Go First!

It is time to celebrate 50 years of the Warming House! On February 6, 1974, the Warming House served coffee and donuts to some Olean folks looking for refuge from the harsh winters of Western New York. Fifty years later, St. Bonaventure University students continue to welcome guests, not for coffee and donuts, but for a hot meal, complete with snack and dessert.

On Jan. 28, an otherwise quiet day in Olean, Warming House meal coordinators gathered at the soup kitchen to prepare a special meal to celebrate 50 years with the guests of the Warming House. It was only fitting that our guests had the opportunity to celebrate the first of many anniversary gatherings.

SBU students and guests played bingo in the dining room and each guest chose prizes of full-size personal care items. The special dinner consisted of chicken piccata, pasta, green salad, garlic bread and, of course, birthday cake! University President Jeff Gingerich and Betsy Gingerich stopped by to thank the meal coordinators for their dedication and goodness to our guests each day.

After the celebration, Mike Wase-da, assistant director of the Franciscan Center for Social Concern, met me with a smile that spoke volumes. He spoke of the joy that filled the Warming House that afternoon, the ways our students visit with guests and the genuine interest they have in the lives and stories the guests tell each day. My heart was full.



▲ Dr. and Mrs. Gingerich stop by the Warming House to thank the student meal coordinators.

There are so many ways the Warming House is very different from the early days. And, at the same time, the foundation that was built remains the same.

Nourishment, Community and Dignity remain the values lived each day. In this anniversary year, we have enhanced the guest experience with new tables and chairs that will arrive this month. We have purchased new plates, cups and bowls and upgraded the camera system. All of these improvements are possible because of a generous gift specified for improvements to the Warming House.

One of the biggest enhancements is the establishment of the Endowment for Warming House Sustainability. This endowment was established in August with a generous five-year pledge. As of today, the endowment has raised more than \$175,000. Our goal is to increase the endowment to \$1,000,000, which would generate about \$50,000 toward the Warming House's annual budget. This amount of support takes a bit of pressure off the annual fundraising needed to keep the Warming House financially

solvent.

Betsy Gingerich, wife of the university president, regularly volunteers at the Warming House. She has graciously agreed to co-chair the Empty Bowls and Baskets Dinner that will be held on Sept. 26 in the Richter Center on campus. The money raised at this dinner will go to the endowment.

It is not lost on me that generations of Bonnies did the hard work of establishing the Warming House and feeding the most vulnerable of our community during the past 50 years.

Today's Warming House team stands on the shoulders of those who have gone before us. Thank you, thank you. St. Bonaventure University and the Olean community are better and richer because of a vision brought to reality many years ago.

Peace and all good,
 Alice Miller Nation
 Director of
 University Ministries



SBU Students Inspire, One Meal at a Time

By Mike Waseda, '21, '23

It's quite common to become engrossed in office tasks, especially with the hustle and bustle of the semester. However, amidst the constant flurry of activity, there's one entity that remains tirelessly occupied year-round, pausing only for select holidays: the Warming House.

Everyone knows that the Warming House is a student-run initiative, so I often field questions about how we manage to sustain its operations during university breaks. In fact, we rely on many community volunteers and SBU faculty and staff members when a lot of our lead students are away.

It is remarkable how we consistently receive support precisely when we need it most. There seems to be a collective understanding about our need for assistance, and the moments like these serve as powerful reminders of the strength of a Bonnie's sense of community.

However, at the Warming House, it is still always the students who take charge and uphold the sense of community by forging connections with volunteers and guests, even during breaks.

Before winter break, Jenna Langley, one of the student coordinators, came to me and said, "Mike, I would like to stay on campus to help at the Warm-



ing House." I responded, "That would be great, Jenna. What days will you be available?" To which Jenna replied: "All days."

On another day, Jenna referred to the Warming House as her child, which is why she feels committed to take care of the kitchen. Jenna is accustomed to working at the Warming House during breaks as she was a member of the Farm to Table Summer Community Program in 2023.

Prior to last summer, Jenna had little knowledge of kitchen operations, but she now leads the team confidently and knows when to take charge.

Another student coordinator who stayed was Gabe Cote. He's one of the regulars who dedicates his time to the Warming House every break. Gabe always says, "This (Warming House) is the reason why I am at Bona's."

Gabe has been coordinating since he became a Bonnie. However, it was not always easy for him. Just like other coordinators, he also started with little knowledge of cooking. One day he had the opportunity to work with one of our community volunteers, Aaron Tierson, who is a chef at local restaurants.

They forged a strong relationship, and, as a result, Gabe began frequenting Aaron's restau-

rants to both dine and learn more about food and cooking. Gabe truly cares about flavors and what our guests eat at the Warming House. When Gabe cooks, the tabletop is occupied with spices, and the spoons and dishes he used for taste testing.

During the semester, the Warming House is an exciting place with many talented coordinators and volunteers working together. They often send me pictures while at the Warming House.

Some pictures are the meals they prepared for the day, beautifully served on dishes. Others show well-organized cans neatly arranged on shelves with all the labels facing out. And there are also snapshots of students making funny faces and texts detailing conversations with guests. How could I not love this job when the students are so passionate about what they do?

In 2023, the Warming House served 23,044 meals, almost 10,000 meals more than in 2022. It may not be easy, but our students consistently make it possible to offer hospitality and nourishment within the community. I know that our students are eagerly anticipating celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Warming House, but they are also prepared to continue serving for many more years to come.

Mike Waseda is the assistant director of the Franciscan Center for Social Concern.

Rural areas, including Cattaraugus County, tend to have higher poverty rates than urban areas, contributing to higher food insecurity rates.

► For 50 years, the Warming House has assisted in the quiet crisis of food insecurity by welcoming all for good community, good dignity and good nutrition. **The Warming House opened on Feb. 6, 1974**, for donuts and coffee and a warm place to gather to combat social isolation. Ten years later, a hot meal service

began serving guests six days a week year-round.

► **The Warming House Endowment for Sustainability** has been established to ensure the Warming House will offer good community, good dignity and good community into the future. SBU students gain valuable experience running a small non-profit, learning management and supervisory skills, as well as living the Franciscan value of encounter with others.

SNAPSHOT

SHOWCASE



▲ Reilly enjoys his visits to the Warming House.



▲ Our students love to make desserts!
► Sixteen months after closing for the pandemic, the dining room opened to guests in July 2021.



▲ Trustee Susanna Stitt and her husband, Jim, at a Warming House celebration on campus Feb. 16.

An Amazing Honors Project

By Walter Kinder, '24

When I applied for the Farm to Table program during my freshman year, it was during a spurt of sudden inspiration. The deadline to apply was that day or had just passed, and after reading a poster in Reilly Center I hurriedly assembled an application.

I was later accepted into Farm to Table, and during that subsequent summer, with every new experience, every up and every down, I enjoyed every minute of the program. Since then, I have been involved with the Franciscan Center for Social Concern and the Warming House as a Warming House coordinator or in some other capacity.

As a student in St. Bonaventure's Honors Program, I wanted to pursue an honors project that would have a positive impact while reflecting on my undergraduate experience. I also did not want to retread the ground covered by my senior comprehensive project in mathematics.

With the help of Alice Miller Nation, the vision of my honors project was created: to collect data on the attitudes and methods used by different soup kitchens within and around New York state to contribute to the knowledge base on the subject, and to ultimately propose an improvement plan for the Warming House.

Between April 2023 and the conclusion of the fall 2023 semester, and with the support of the Franciscan Center for Social Concern, I visited four soup kitchens. At each, I met different people, listened to different stories, and experienced varied approaches to service. Some of



▲ Evan and Spencer from Hebrew Union College's soup kitchen welcome Walter Kinder (center) for a day of learning about the soup kitchen's daily operations.

the kitchens were within an afternoon's trip; others were farther. In fall 2023 I visited a soup kitchen set against the largest backdrop yet: Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion's soup kitchen in New York City. HUC-JIR is a college that specializes in training rabbis and cantors.

For most of my visits I traveled alone; however, for this one, my father offered to accompany me. With the help of the FCSC, we booked train tickets, and we reserved a room in a hotel just beside Washington Square Park in Manhattan.

I spent an afternoon at HUC-JIR's soup kitchen helping with their operations and interviewed Evan Traylor, a fourth-year rabbinical student and a member of the soup kitchen's student leadership team. My time there was wonderful, as were my visits with the community amid a pleasant and comfortable atmosphere.

In my time outside of HUC-JIR's soup kitchen, my father and I traveled around New York, enjoying the Christmas energy. I am thankful that my Franciscan experience at St. Bonaventure was able to culminate into such a memorable, impactful and sweet moment.