



**100**  
We achieved a  
Fresh Start milestone—  
100 graduates.  
Read more on Page 4.



**Heart Ministry Center**  
DIGNITY FOR ALL

**CELEBRATING  
OUR NEIGHBORS  
AND HONORING  
ACHIEVEMENTS AT  
COMMUNITY DAY**

Community is one of Heart Ministry Center’s core values. So, it was fitting to celebrate Heart Ministry Center Community Day on September 29 with hundreds of friends and neighbors – along with delicious homemade food and activities.

**Read more on Page 3.**

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DIGNITY FOR ALL  
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# Letter from the CEO

Seasons changing is part of life. As we enter fall this year, I'm acutely aware of all that has changed and all that has remained the same during my nine years at Heart Ministry Center.

### What has stayed the same?

- Food remains the Center's core competency. As a result of our highly interactive "Choice" Food Distribution, meaningful relationships are formed. Through these relationships, we have the opportunity to share our other Campus resources with community members.
- "Dignity For All" is our guiding motto, and it remains the one and only rule we have at Heart Ministry Center. No exceptions. It is the tie that binds us.
- Heart Ministry Center belongs to the community of north Omaha. All of us — donors, volunteers, employees and community members — are stewards of this resource that continues to organically meet the needs of those who utilize it where they are.

### What has changed?

- Four full-time employees have become more than 40, and with this growth we now have a \$4 million annual operating budget.
- Several hundred thousand pounds of food a year in food distribution has grown to over five million pounds of food distributed annually. This makes our Campus home of the largest food distribution center in the state.
- Our one-time 10,000 square foot Campus is now over 27,000 square feet, covering the blocks from Binney to Wirt. It houses one of the nicest pantries in the country, a turnkey interdisciplinary healthcare clinic and a social enterprise laundromat, which generates close to \$17,000.00 a month in revenue and supports four jobs.

Change has been a struggle at times, a struggle we share with each other and those in need. What has stayed the same has kept us together in this struggle, unified in our relationships and "Dignity For All."

Thank you for being a part of the Heart!

Mark Dahir  
*MARK DAHIR*  
Chief Executive Officer



# HOLY SMOKES Raises More Than \$500,000

We cannot thank you enough for your incredible support in making the 17th Annual Holy Smokes fundraiser the most successful event we have ever had.

Holy Smokes raised over \$500,000 for Heart Ministry Center! This will allow us to provide critical meals, healthcare, job training, education, laundry services and other vital resources on our campus – keeping "Dignity for All" at the center of all we do. ■

## Special thanks to our honorary chairs, Shannon and Jeff Royal, and our sponsors:

- |                                |                                |                                  |
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| Cindy and Mogens Bay           | Melissa and Patrick Duffy      | Laura and Dan Monen              |
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# CELEBRATING OUR NEIGHBORS AND HONORING ACHIEVEMENTS AT COMMUNITY DAY

COMMUNITY IS ONE OF HEART MINISTRY CENTER’S CORE VALUES. ON SEPTEMBER 29, WE CELEBRATED WITH HUNDREDS OF FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS WITH DELICIOUS HOMEMADE FOOD AND ACTIVITIES AT HEART MINISTRY CENTER COMMUNITY DAY.

Generous friends of the Center roasted a pig off-site and brought the pork, along with hot dogs, bratwurst and side dishes, to share. Guests ate a picnic lunch or were able to take meals home in to-go containers prepared by volunteers.

Martin Gonzalez, a 2018 graduate of Heart Ministry Center’s Fresh Start Job Placement Program, received the Aaron Schneider Fresh Start Excellence Award.

Julia Knezetic, a devoted weekly volunteer, was honored with the Louis “Big Lou” Parker Heart Heroes Volunteer Award.

Frank Russ, a 2022 Fresh Start graduate who is currently employed as a facilities specialist at the Center, was surprised with a new car donated from Baxter Auto. ■



Mark Dahir (left) congratulates Frank Russ (right) after he was surprised with a new car.



Mark Dahir (left) and Craig Schneider (right) present the Aaron Schneider Fresh Start Excellence Award to Martin Gonzalez (center), a 2018 Fresh Start Job Placement Program graduate.



Mark Dahir (left) and “Big Lou” Parker (center left) present Julia Knezetic (center right) with the Louis “Big Lou” Parker Heart Heroes Volunteer Award for her devoted weekly volunteering. Volunteer coordinator, Greg Glenn (right), was also on hand for the presentation.

## Share Your Time and Talents as a Volunteer

Volunteers have a tremendous impact on our operations at Heart Ministry Center and on the community we serve.

Last year, we distributed more than 5.1 million pounds of food to nearly 120,000 community members through our Choice Food Distribution Program thanks in part to our dedicated volunteers. We also have individuals who donate their time and skills in our Monen Healthcare Clinic, our

Fresh Start Laundromat, and help with classes in our Willing Partner Program.

We are grateful for everyone who has supported Heart Ministry Center and the thousands of families across the Omaha metro experiencing poverty through volunteering. You are a special part of our community.

**If you are interested in volunteering or organizing a group of friends, family members, or colleagues to volunteer, please visit [HeartMinistryCenter.org](https://HeartMinistryCenter.org) to register or contact Greg Glenn, volunteer coordinator, at 402-702-1525 or [Greg@HeartMinistryCenter.org](mailto:Greg@HeartMinistryCenter.org). Recurring volunteer opportunities are available. ■**



“Every one of the 200 students we brought to Heart Ministry Center said that the experience opened their hearts and minds to the needs of others and to the possibility that we really could live in peace and equality with one another if we would only apply the principles of Heart Ministry Center to our daily lives.”  
- MICHELE SWEETMON, Campus Ministry Gross Catholic High School



# Legal Clinic Offers Long-Term Solutions for Those in Need

For two years, Heart Ministry Center has hosted the Lawyers in the City program to provide free legal consultations. The program was very well utilized, but Linda Alsharif, A Way Forward senior director, wanted to offer a more comprehensive legal resource for community members.

Linda and the Willing Partner team collaborated with local attorneys to establish a Legal Clinic at Heart Ministry Center starting in November 2022. Participating attorneys will be involved with all aspects of a community member’s case from start to resolution. Areas of specialty include: family law, immigration law, insurance law, and healthcare law. Mediation will also be offered.

The Legal Clinic will be held monthly at Heart Ministry Center. Attorneys and the Willing Partner team will jointly decide which civil cases to take. There is no cost to community members.



“We are excited to offer long-term legal solutions with our community members,” said Linda. “Being able to see a case through to its completion is very impactful for community members as they strive to move forward into self-sufficiency.” ■

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If you’ve never experienced Dignity for All in-person, we invite you to visit and take a tour! Meet our staff and see our campus – it will do your heart good!

# Not Defined by Her Past, Fresh Start Alum Meghan Undajon Learned to Love Herself and Serve Others

Meghan Undajon grew up in a loving home in Papillion, but over the years, she struggled with alcoholism, misdiagnosed mental illness, and maintaining long-term employment.

While living in an Oxford House, Meghan started volunteering regularly at Heart Ministry Center in January 2022 and learned about the Fresh Start Program from an alumna and former Center employee.

“I was isolating a lot,” Meghan said. “Heart Ministry Center took me out of my comfort zone and brought me back into the community.”

Meghan signed her contract for the Fresh Start Program in March 2022. She had to leave the Oxford House and moved into Stephen Center for 90 days, but she continued to be dedicated to the program.

“In the Fresh Start Program, I learned about work ethic, being of service to others, and other skills I lacked. I began feeling better about myself. I used to quit on myself a lot. The program taught me perseverance. I saw others ring the bell, and I wanted that too.”

The Fresh Start Program is a holistic, intensive human resource training and placement program empowering participants to achieve a fresh start and sustain self-sufficiency. It encompasses mental and physical health, money and household management, communication, and job skills. Graduates are placed with a community employer in a position that will balance their household budgets. Ongoing facilitation continues with graduates. **One hundred women and men have graduated from the program!**



Meghan graduated in August 2022 and was hired as a facilities specialist at Heart Ministry Center. She celebrated three years of sobriety and is living in a sober living house.

“Now I’m feeling better than ever. I’m grateful for everything. I won’t let my past define me. It is guiding me into my future,” she said. ■

GET CONNECTED TO OUR COMMUNITY TODAY

 Visit Heart Ministry Center’s campus and take a tour to see our mission in action.

 Volunteer at our Choice Food Distribution providing fresh and shelf-stable food items to community members in need.

 Make a financial gift to Heart Ministry Center or donate in honor of a loved one.

 Follow us on social media.

Thank you for supporting Heart Ministry Center. You are making a difference with families experiencing poverty in the Omaha metro.

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