



Heart Ministry Center
DIGNITY FOR ALL

FRESH FLORAL BLOOMS AS HEART MINISTRY CENTER'S SECOND SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

As a community-minded social enterprise, customer purchases help support Heart Ministry Center and our mission of providing food, healthcare and a way forward to people severely affected by poverty in the Omaha area.

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Remembering Mark J. Dahir

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Letter from our Interim CEO

Damany Rahn, was appointed as Interim CEO in August 2023 after the sudden passing of Heart Ministry Center CEO, Mark Dahir. Rahn joined Heart Ministry Center as the eighth employee in 2015 as the director of case management and social work. Since then, he has held numerous other leadership roles, including associate executive director, director of strategic partnerships, and most recently, chief human resource officer.

It has been an honor to serve in this capacity. I was elated at our board's unanimous decision to name me the Interim CEO. This shows their commitment to furthering the work we have started. However, it is humbling.

Working at the Heart Ministry Center is personal for me. When I see the faces of the men, women, and children that come into our doors and must meet a need to feed their families, I see me. As a child, I needed access to these services that were not delivered in a dignified way. At the Heart Ministry Center, we pride ourselves on treating everyone well and the constant improvement of services to meet community members' needs together. Our team will continue to carry out our mission of providing food, healthcare and a way forward to people severely affected by poverty in the Omaha area.

When growing up, my family needed assistance to survive, we waited in cheese lines (pantries). I only wish there was a place like the "Heart" when I was a child, as we believe in Dignity for All. This was never my experience growing up. From the first time I entered the Heart Ministry Center doors, I felt it was a place of healing and hope. I personally have grown through that healing. I am inspired and energized every time we graduate a Fresh Start participant or when a Willing Partner realizes a goal that may have eluded them.

I am most proud of the many lives being impacted daily at Heart Ministry Center and for being a part of the tremendous growth and talent at the organization. There are now 47 employees and two social enterprises. The Choice Food Distribution Program provided nearly 3.2 million pounds of food to 143,000 community members last year. More than 120 men and women have graduated from the Fresh Start Program. We will build upon Mark Dahir's incredible legacy and continue to move Heart Ministry Center forward.

Damany Rahn

Interim Chief Executive Officer



Remembering Mark J. Dahir

1974-2023

“**Do the next right thing.**”

The Heart Ministry Center community has experienced an immeasurable loss with the sudden passing of our chief executive officer and dear friend, Mark Dahir, on August 3, 2023.

“Mark’s raw vulnerability and passion left an indelible impression on everyone in the room, including me,” said Rob Wilcox, president of Heart Ministry Center’s Board of Directors. “This is a man worth following, I remember thinking. While Mark’s tragic passing leaves a deep hole in the heart of the Heart Ministry Center community, his legacy lives on through his gifted team and through the many volunteers and community members he’s touched along the way.”

Mark lived every day with intention and passion. He embodied Heart Ministry Center’s guiding motto, Dignity for All, and the organization’s core values: compassion, community, accountability, and excellence.

“There’s something about seeing the best in a human being. And we do that at the Heart Ministry Center,” said Mark.

“POVERTY DOES NOT TAKE DAYS OFF. AND WE DO NOT TAKE DAYS OFF AT THE HEART MINISTRY CENTER. WE ARE ALL IN, ALL DAY, EVERY DAY.”
- Mark Dahir

He impacted the lives of tens of thousands of people during his nine-year tenure at Heart Ministry Center and throughout his life.

“Mark was a friend and a brother,” said Damany Rahn, interim chief executive officer at Heart Ministry Center. “There wasn’t a thing we didn’t discuss. We often talked about God and our faith. We talked about family, my wife and kids, and his daughter. We shared a nonjudgement space with each other that was filled with compassion and accountability. I will miss his one-of-a-kind personality, his passion for life, and his ability to make everyone around him better.”

Mark’s legacy will live on through the programs he put in place and through all of the people who he has inspired to follow the example he set — to see people from a place of compassion and do whatever is required to help people in need. Mark’s was a life well lived. We hope that people everywhere are inspired to live their lives as he did. ■

“**Hope is a weapon.**”

“**Today just may be the best day of your life.**”

MJD

Rick Berger Joins Senior Leadership Team



Rick Berger joined Heart Ministry Center on Monday, August 28, 2023, as the chief development officer. Rick is an Omaha native who previously served as the vice president of advancement at Creighton Prep since 2016. His role at Heart Ministry Center includes developing and managing fundraising initiatives that support Heart Ministry Center’s mission and provide resources to grow programs that help our Omaha Community.

“Delivering on the Heart Ministry Center’s mission to provide food, healthcare and A Way Forward for people severely impacted by poverty in Omaha is vital to the community members we serve. It is my honor to be here at the Heart Ministry Center to help fulfill and grow our mission,” said Berger. ■



FRESH FLORAL BLOOMS AS HEART MINISTRY CENTER'S SECOND SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

BRIGHT BURSTS OF COLOR. FRAGRANT SCENTS. BREATHTAKING ARRANGEMENTS. CELEBRATIONS AND SPECIAL OCCASIONS CREATIVELY IMAGINED.



FRESH Floral team, clockwise from top left: Remus Smolsky, SophiaRose Brown, Rayna Pollock, Elizabeth Grundman, and Patty Brown

Heart Ministry Center launched our second social enterprise in March 2023 after acquiring Voila! Magdalene Blooms in Dundee. FRESH Floral is a specialty floral and gift boutique located at 4922 Dodge Street in Omaha, with a talented team committed to providing customers with beautiful arrangements for any occasion, and an excellent experience. From treasured favorites and time-honored classics, to wonderfully unexpected varieties, FRESH Floral is the place that proves time and again – the possibilities are endless.

As a community-minded social enterprise, customers' purchases help support Heart Ministry Center and our mission of providing food,

healthcare and a way forward to people severely affected by poverty in the Omaha area. In addition, FRESH Floral provides job training and short-term employment for graduates of the Heart Ministry Center Fresh Start Program. The boutique also has a section of items for sale from local artisans.

Rayna Pollock serves as the FRESH Floral director. Prior to this role, Pollock was the director of the Fresh Start Laundromat, Heart Ministry Center's inaugural social enterprise located on our campus on North 24th Street.

FRESH Floral works in partnership with Julie Hockney, an accomplished interior designer and owner of

Bouquet, a floral design studio, to bring customers extraordinary floral arrangements and service.

To learn more about FRESH Floral and to place an order, please visit FreshFloralOmaha.com or stop by to see the boutique in Dundee. ■



Fresh Start Alumna Never Gave Up on Her Future

Crystal Seefus greets everyone with a warm smile and compassionate attitude. As a Fresh Start Facilitator, she enjoys sharing her lived experiences with current Fresh Start participants and those considering the program, and providing information about Heart Ministry Center's campus of resources so others may benefit like she has.

An Omaha native, Seefus experienced abuse and trauma at home growing up. She learned about Heart Ministry Center and the Fresh Start Program when she was in a sober living house, after getting out of jail. She had a job cleaning houses but thought the program was a great opportunity to set herself up for long term success. Crystal interviewed and joined the Fresh Start Program in January 2021.

"Fresh Start was a humbling experience," Seefus said. "I learned how to budget. I was never taught how to manage my finances before. I also learned how to set boundaries and to help others without expecting anything in return."

The Fresh Start Program is a holistic, intensive human resource training program empowering

participants to achieve a fresh start in life and be self-sufficient. It encompasses mental and physical health, financial and household management, communication, and job skills. Graduates are placed with a community employer in a position that is suited to their aptitudes and that will balance their household budgets. Ongoing facilitation continues with graduates. More than 120 women and men have graduated from the program.

Seefus graduated from the Fresh Start Program in July 2021 and was hired as a laundromat associate at the Fresh Start Laundromat. She became a valued employee and was eventually promoted to the laundromat manager.

"I tell Fresh Starts that I've been in your shoes. I know how hard it can be. This isn't just a job for me. I truly care," said Seefus.

"Crystal took advantage of everything that Fresh Start had to offer and now has her own car, moved into an apartment and furnished it for her children, and graduated from Douglas County Drug Court,

The Fresh Start Program taught me that when things are hard, don't give up. Trust the process.



which takes years and a lot of hard work to accomplish. Crystal is what we dream every Fresh Start can become, someone who lives their lives in recovery, has reliable transportation, balances her household budget, is a fantastic mother to her children again, and is a very valued employee," said Cassandra Schmitz, Fresh Start program director.

"The Fresh Start Program taught me that when things are hard, don't give up." Seefus said. "Trust the process." ■



Holy Smokes is Right



Heart Ministry Center's 18th annual Holy Smokes Fundraiser BBQ on August 31 was our most successful event ever – raising critical funds as we continue to provide meals, healthcare, job training, education, laundry services and other vital resources on our campus – in a way that ensures Dignity For All at the center of all we do.

The recent loss of CEO Mark Dahir renewed our sense of commitment to those who rely on Heart Ministry Center.

A heartfelt thanks to our honorary chairs, Gail and Mike Yanney, and to all of the sponsors, guests, volunteers and staff members.



Award Recipients Celebrated at Community BBQ

Congratulations to Tiffany Wheeler, recipient of the 2023 Aaron Schneider Fresh Start Excellence Award. Wheeler was a 2022 graduate of the Heart Ministry Center's Fresh Start Job Training Program.

We also congratulate Theresa Wiggs, our 2023 Louis "Big Lou" Parker Heart Heroes Volunteer Award recipient. Wiggs volunteers weekly at Heart Ministry Center, organizing donated toiletries items for the Willing Partner Program.

Wheeler and Wiggs were recognized and celebrated at Heart Ministry Center's community BBQ in June. Both exemplify Heart Ministry Center's core values of compassion, community, accountability and excellence, and our guiding motto of "Dignity for All." ■

Craig Schneider, father of late Fresh Start alumnus, Aaron Schneider, for whom the award is named; Tiffany Wheeler, 2023 honoree; and Mark Dahir, late CEO of Heart Ministry Center



Director of hospitality, Big Lou Parker, for whom the award is named, and Theresa Wiggs, 2023 honoree.



By volunteering, I thought I would learn only about other people, but I actually learned so much more about myself.

Director of hospitality, Big Lou Parker, inspires student volunteers from Our Lady of Lourdes.

Heartfelt Gratitude for our Volunteers

Volunteers have a tremendous impact on our operations at Heart Ministry Center and on the community we serve. Last year we distributed nearly 3.2 million pounds of food to 143,000 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 Momen Healthcare Clinic and Fresh Start Laundromat, and assist with classes and other initiatives 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.

"Our students at Heart Ministry Center were able to use their principles of accountability,

community and compassion and then could apply the experience to live their daily lives as children of God," said Josh Hernandez, 8th grade teacher at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic School.

"By volunteering, I thought I would learn only about other people, but I actually learned so much more about myself," said Hazel Clements, 8th grade student at Our Lady of Lourdes.

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

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.

FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA

[heartministrycenter](https://www.facebook.com/heartministrycenter) [heartministrycenter](https://www.instagram.com/heartministrycenter)



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