

Patchwork Hospitality *by Amy Rich*

Mornings used to be very quiet at Patchwork. A few families would stop in at our food pantry. One or two people would inquire about where to get help with utilities or their rent. Maybe someone would ask to use the phone. That was about all.

But things have changed in recent years. Now, Monday–Thursday from 8:30 am to Noon, you will find our main room filled with a variety of people. They are men, women, and children of all ages who come from various backgrounds and who have different reasons for visiting Patchwork.

Some of our guests are homeless men and women who utilize our showers and enjoy a safe place where they can relax for the morning. Some are low income individuals and families who live nearby and seek services to help them stretch their limited resources. Others are our neighbors who are disabled or mentally ill and who visit us daily for companionship and entertainment. Others have simply found that Patchwork is a peaceful place where they can meet up with their friends and discuss the issues of the world. All come because they know they will be greeted kindly by someone willing to talk with them with respect.

When you think about the institutions that you need to have to make a healthy neighborhood, you might think of the fire department or a police station. Maybe a park. Maybe a school, a grocery store, a bank, or a library. Maybe a restaurant or two. I would suggest that nestled in your ideal little neighborhood is a Patchwork: a place that's not quite like the rest; a place where the pace can be slower, relationships can be built, and special requests can be honored.

Several weeks ago, I sat in the ER with one of our regulars. She'd asked for a ride there and John was not available. She asked me to stay with her, so I did. We were there for several hours, and at the end she thanked me for being there. I told her I was there because I care and because that's the kind of neighborhood I want to be part of—one where neighbors care about each other and help each other out.

Most of why I do what I do at Patchwork is because this is the kind of neighborhood I want to be part of.



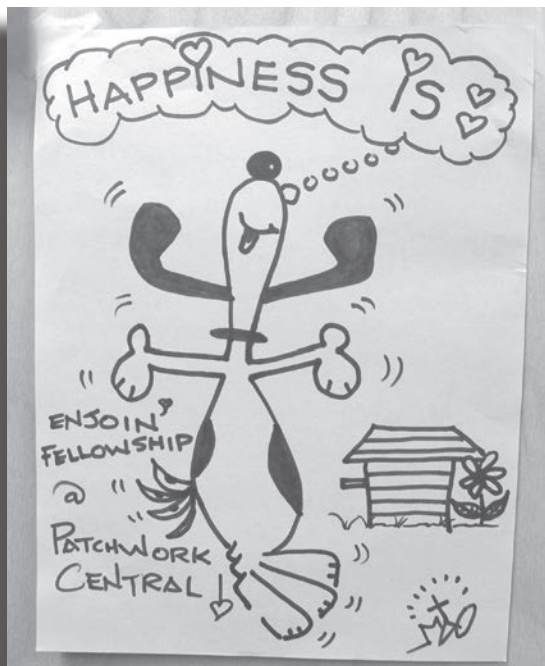
It's a place where people meet each other. It's a place where there is time to build relationships between diverse people. It's a place to help people understand one another. It's a place where people look out for each other.

Patchwork's hospitality includes a wide range of people. There are Patchwork staff to supervise it, but also volunteers who help make coffee and who talk with and listen to our guests. And there are the guests themselves. All contribute to the community that develops here.



Chris Davis and Gail LaFief decided to make pancakes for our guests on a recent morning.

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Peg Ray and Darlene Blagg are two members of the "Pool Posse," a group of friends who provide some special items to the Patchwork Food Pantry and who bring breakfast for our morning guests on special occasions.



***Left:** One favorite among our regulars is Midler the parrot.*



***Right:** Darlene Blagg is famous for her mini breakfast casseroles.*



***Above:** Robert Goodloe is one of our neighbors. He and his grandson brought balloons to share on Valentine's Day.*



***Right:** William Brewer, custodian, and Shawn Craddock, main office and hospitality coordinator, are essential members of the Patchwork team that assure Patchwork guests are welcomed into the building and that everything runs smoothly.*

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Because it is such a shared experience, below are the voices of several different people to help explain and describe Patchwork Hospitality.

Shawn Craddock, one of two Main Office and Hospitality Coordinators staff members

Patchwork has been offering hospitality since the beginning, but Hospitality as we know it now has evolved through the years. About 10-12 years ago, Susan Steincamp had just started working at Aurora Evansville, and she would occasionally call to ask if she could bring homeless clients to Patchwork to take a shower. In the early days, we would maybe provide two to three showers a week, but as time went on, the word got out, and people began making their way to our building on their own to ask to take a shower.

Around 2011, we started tracking the number of showers we provided and our numbers were around 600 a year. In 2018, we have almost doubled that number to around 1100 men's and women's showers annually. We also began serving coffee and pastries during this time. Since there were so many people in the building waiting to use the food pantry, to take a shower, or to find refuge from the weather, we thought it would be nice to provide coffee while they waited, and since we have pastries in the food pantry we began setting out snacks for our visitors.

One of the parts of hospitality that feels most important is the way in which we provide these services. We take the time to know the names of the people that come into our building, we know a little about their lives, and when they stop in they feel recognized and welcomed. It feels very important that the people who enter our doors know that they are in a place where they can be seen and heard and valued. So often, in many of their lives they come from places of mental illness, addiction, trauma from abuse and neglect, and lives filled with chaos. Many of them feel isolated, disconnected, often invisible and even feared by others. When they enter our building, they are seen, they have connections with us, and for a few moments in their life they have a place where they feel like they fit in.

We have a man who, on a bad day, stands outside by his apartment building and screams profanities at a nonexistent person, but he can gather himself together, if even for a brief moment, to come into Patchwork where we welcome him by name and offer him coffee or bread from the bread cart, he asks what time it is, and he moves on.

In a world where so many people feel disconnected, isolated, and lonely, Patchwork is like the friendly neighborhood pub, reminding me of the song from the old show Cheers, "Where everybody knows your name and they're always glad you came."



Helen Fisher, Wednesday morning Hospitality Hostess

Hospitality is sharing friendship, food and beverages in a friendly, congenial atmosphere. Hospitality at Patchwork Central is making and serving coffee and snacks and finding that you love what you do.

I started volunteering at Patchwork in November 2016 as a hospitality hostess on Wednesday mornings. I had no idea that I would love what I do for the folks who come to get in out of the cold in the winter or heat in the summer. Most of these folks are men, but I have also gotten acquainted with two special women who I now include in my monthly home communion visits.

Most of the visitors are repeat "clients." I know them by their first names—Big Jim, Robert, Johnny, Eugene, Cheryl, and Lisa. They visit and share stories with each other and with me. It is a very friendly atmosphere. They seem happy to see me when I arrive, and I'm always glad that they are present. If for some reason one or two of them don't show up on a given Wednesday, I worry and wonder, "Are they okay?"

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I am convinced that when John and Amy asked for volunteers and I accepted after the second invitation, I was responding not only to them, but to God. In the book of James, chapter 2, verses 14 to 26, the author deals with the subject of faith and works. As the scripture states, “Faith without works is dead.” I truly believe that the JOY I receive from hostessing is because I am putting my faith in God into practice by serving these men and women who come through our doors here at Patchwork Central.

I will continue to do what I do here at Patchwork Central for as long as God gives me the health and energy to do it. Last month I had a little episode of some memory loss, and my husband was concerned and took me to the hospital. The doctor that I saw in the emergency room admitted me for several tests. The next morning because a friend reported at Patchwork that I was in the hospital, the staff got a card out, and folks who were enjoying their morning wrote notes and signed their names to it. Johnny brought the card, plus a sweet gift of house slippers, and delivered them to me in my hospital room. I was thrilled beyond belief. I couldn’t wait to get back to Patchwork to thank everyone!



How could you not love this special place? Patchwork Central is a beacon of HOPE in our neighborhood as we share hospitality with anyone and everyone who comes through our doors! Thank you, God.

Johnny Watson, Neighbor

I never really knew about this place until I came to get my bike repaired. I saw somebody in the parking lot with a cup of coffee, and I asked where he got the coffee from. He pointed toward the building. So I came inside. I like to read, so I read everything and looked at all the art. Then I got to where the hallway opens up into the main room and I could feel the beautiful spirit of this place. Now I come for coffee on Tuesdays and Wednesdays when I’m off work.

Darlene Blagg, Patchwork Food Pantry Volunteer

I started back at Patchwork working in the Food Pantry in 2007, and we’ve seen a lot of changes since then. When we started out, we had vegetables that came in, but only the people who had food pantry referrals had the opportunity to get them. But later we were able to get more and more fruit in and vegetables, and we started putting them out for everybody. You know how expensive it is. You go to the store and try to buy fruits and vegetables—it’s expensive. And you know the homeless don’t have the money to get them. We put bread out for everyone, but they needed something healthier, so we started putting the fruit and the vegetables out, and they all seemed to really enjoy that.

Then, back in 2015, Billy and Tom lost their dog Tuly, and the Blackford’s Grove Neighborhood Association decided to start a Tuly Fund so they would buy dog food and cat food and give to us. They said they didn’t want dogs and cats going hungry. If people are hungry, cats and dogs are going to be hungry, too. So, we started giving out dog and cat food, and everybody says, “Well, I’ve never seen a food pantry giving out dog food before!” Well, it’s unique. Very unique.



And then a little over a year ago, I was noticing a lot of people not taking canned food. I finally found out why: because they didn’t have can openers. One guy came in. He had his thumb all wrapped up.

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I said, “What’s the matter with your thumb?” “Aw. I cut it open trying to open a can with my knife.” Well, then it dawned on me we needed can openers. So, I belong to a group, we call ourselves the Pool Posse, and I said, “We need can openers. Can you guys help?” Last year we gave out 89 can openers. So it’s good that we have can openers. You know, you take things like this for granted. You take for granted things like can openers. But, I think it’s wonderful that people make special trips back to the volunteers in the food pantry and say, “Thank you for being here. Thank you for helping us.” We make a change in these people, and I’m proud to be a part of it.

Robert Kell, neighbor

I love Patchwork! I can get a fresh cup of coffee in the morning, a bite to eat, make sure my pantry in my house is full once a month. There are people to converse with; I can read the newspaper. Everybody’s friends.

Robert Goodloe, Neighbor

Patchwork is a very great place, like, safe, like a church sanctuary. It’s a peaceful place. There are lots of other places I could go, but this is a pleasant place. You [the office staff] really don’t realize how valuable this place is. You don’t realize how nice this place is. I don’t need it as much as some, but people need it. Patchwork helps patch up people’s lives.

Gail LaFief, Tuesday Morning Hospitality Volunteer

Something special happens here. This is a gathering place. I think it’s a place where people feel accepted. Sometimes I come in and someone’s playing the piano. One man likes the atmosphere and brings his grandson. It’s a unique group of people. The people who come in are like a community. They share information and resources with each other.



I collect smiles and I find the most amazingly beautiful smiles and although the coffee is free, sometimes I trade coffee for smiles. If I bring in anything that varies, like cheezy grits, you would have thought I brought in prime rib! The cheezy grits really brought out the stories. Everyone had a story about eating them when they were growing up.

They’re here for the relief from being on the street or being alone in an apartment. Not everyone is homeless. Some are just looking for a place to have a cup of coffee. One guy said this is the quietest place he has to be.

It’s an incredibly appreciative group. You don’t hear a lot of complaining. Someone was thanking me. I said, “Everybody does this stuff.” He said, “No, Gail. You’re different.”

It’s things like me serving them at the table—and it’s not just me—we treat them in kind ways that they haven’t experienced a lot. They’re people who don’t hear kind things about themselves.

We don’t turn away challenging people. We care through the challenging people. It’s unconditional acceptance, but we do have expectations for them while they’re here.

There’s the verse in Romans that says, “We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us.” I was thinking, what gifts did God give you? I’ve come to a conclusion that I’m a nurturer, so this is a fit for me.

This place is a blessing. People can get so many things all in one place: coffee, food. We always have something for them to eat. Someone said he doesn’t mind waiting in line for showers here because we’ve got the cleanest showers in town.

Patchwork Hospitality By the Numbers...

Last year we provided:

- Approximately **9,278** instances of hospitality, including cups of coffee, phone use, fax machine use, snacks, a newspaper to read, bread, fresh produce, and referrals to other local agencies.
- **1,160** showers for individuals who, for various reasons, had no other access to shower facilities.
- **2,000** pots of coffee.
- Our food pantry served **2,765** individuals from **1,577** households by distributing almost **24.5** tons of food.
- **712** pounds of pet food.
- **131** refurbished adult bikes and **15** youth bikes to new owners, plus numerous repairs.
- **431** total health encounters for **88** total clients of the Sozo Health Ministry. Services included **84** instances of transporting clients to medical appointments, **249** checks of blood pressure, and **86** instances of medical supplies distributed. They also included **6** occasions in which staff identified emergency health situations in clients and an ambulance was called or the client was transported by Sozo staff to an ER.

First Friday

Through September, the Haynie's Corner Arts District is celebrating the arts and culture with an art walk on the first Friday of every month. Patchwork Central is one hub of activity each First Friday. Stop by and see us!

From 5:30 pm–9:00 pm, you will find Patchwork filled with an eclectic mix of live music, local artists, and tasty food. Admission is free, and the event at Patchwork is family-friendly.

Every month Monte Skelton will perform starting at 7:00 pm, and Turn Table, LLC will serve snacks in our kitchen. Every month we will host a different group of 3-6 visual artists selling jewelry, drawings, paintings, prints, and woodworking. Every month Jeanne's Gelato will serve up dessert on Patchwork's front lawn while additional live music plays in the Patchwork Tower. Every month you'll find a selection of food trucks parked across Washington Avenue from Patchwork. If you choose to get food from one of them, you're welcome to eat your meal inside Patchwork.

Come to Patchwork to say hello, then visit the other exciting activities that stretch from Haynie's Corner to our friends along Washington Avenue: Stef L's Amour (936 Judson St) and StaC Art Gallery (416 Washington Ave).



E-Newsletter

More Stories! More Photos! More News!

Sign up for our bi-weekly e-newsletter! You will receive email updates highlighting the most recent happenings at Patchwork.

Simply visit our website, www.Patchwork.org, and click the "join our mailing list" link!

Updating Your Will?

The next time you update your will, please consider adding Patchwork Central, Inc as a beneficiary. As a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, Patchwork is eligible to receive donations from bequests. Any size gift makes a big difference in providing for our programming and contributing to our long-term stability.



Phyllis Donahue is one example of someone who has included Patchwork in her will. She says:

As a volunteer with the children's Arts and Smarts Program for 6 years, I see firsthand how our programs change children's lives. I have put Patchwork in my will to allow these programs to continue.

The process is as simple as including our full name, our street address, and the amount or percentage you would like to give.



Sunday Worship

The Patchwork Community meets for worship every Sunday at 5:15 p.m. at the Meetinghouse, 100 Washington Avenue, followed by a covered dish supper.

All are welcome!

Patchwork Central, Inc.

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Please be generous as you consider sending your cash contribution in the envelope provided for your convenience. Your generosity will help us continue the Patchwork tradition of providing these many creative programs.

PATCHWORK'S MISSION STATEMENT

Patchwork Central creates community, honors personal dignity, empowers people, and encourages spiritual and social growth through its programs and hospitality, its opportunities for learning, its creative atmosphere and cultivation of the arts, and its work toward reconciliation and a more peaceful and just world.





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