

chestnut hill local

For area's needy, Mt. Airy angel provides a tasty 'Kitchen of Love'



Santander Bank and the Philadelphia Eagles recently honored David Norton of Elkins Park and Marlene Trice of Mt. Airy. Trice, 72, was recognized for her Kitchen of Love food pantry, which feeds more than 700 families each week.

by Brenda Lange

For more than 20 years, Marlene Trice of Mt. Airy has provided much-needed food for the hungry in Philadelphia. The founder of "Kitchen of Love" first opened the food pantry in North Philadelphia in the Taylor Memorial Baptist Church until it closed and she was invited to reopen in the office basement of then-State Rep. (now Councilwoman) Cherelle Parker in Mt. Airy.

Since 2013, Trice has operated from the 8500 block of Pickering Street, where she distributes 30-pound boxes and blocks of cheese in addition to fruits, vegetables and meat to senior citizens on the first Wednesday of each month and to anyone in need on Thursdays from 8:30 to 9:30 a.m. On Fridays, she opens from 5 to 11 a.m., handing out tickets to anyone who gets in line before the Philabundance truck arrives at about 9 a.m. Those receiving the numbered tickets come back at that time and get in line according to their number.

“I don’t turn anyone away,” says Trice. “If you are standing in my line, you need it. And the weather doesn’t matter. We’re always there.”

Trice, 72, comes by her altruism naturally. Her father used to gather his family to put together food baskets for other families who didn’t have enough to eat. She remembers giving them out at Thanksgiving and Christmas and one day decided to carry on his legacy.

Today, Kitchen of Love operates as an all-volunteer organization, feeding hundreds of Philadelphians through the work of 14 volunteers aged 13 to 85. “Even my three kids and eight grandkids help out, but my eight great-grandkids are still too little,” she says.

The group organizes fundraisers, helps Councilwoman Parker with a Christmas tree lighting and distributing toys, food and candy for kids in early December, and gives away turkeys and food for 200 to 300 people at Thanksgiving time. Trice is grateful for the generosity of local stores — Wawa, Whole Foods, Target, Giant, Acme and Outback — from which she and her helpers pick up food weekly.

Trice, who has been married 52 years and worked at a variety of jobs over the years and has always been involved with community service, was the 2013 recipient of the Andrus Award for Community Service through AARP for her outstanding work in enriching the lives of others.

In December, she was recognized for her good deeds by being named a “Santander Community Quarterback” through a program in which the bank partners with the Philadelphia Eagles to honor and support the efforts of community members who make a difference for so many throughout the year.

Out of a semi-finalist field of 10, Trice made it to the final three. She was invited, along with the other nine semi-finalists, to a reception and given several gifts: a \$500 donation for her charity, an Eagles jersey with her name on it and two tickets to a home game, complete with VIP game-day experience and tour of Lincoln Financial Field. She also received a football with her name on it, which she has safely ensconced in a glass case in her home.

“I was so excited (and so was my husband) because I’ve never been to an Eagles game before,” she says with a chuckle. “It was the experience of a lifetime ... I got the royal treatment. I’m still grinning two months later!” And to make the experience even better, the Eagles won — the Dec. 23 game between the birds and the Houston Texans, which the Eagles won, 32-30. “I brought them good luck,” she adds.

“This year’s Santander Community Quarterback honorees unequivocally demonstrate the strength and generosity of the Philadelphia community; a sentiment that resounds throughout our organization,” said Don Smolenski, Eagles president, in a press release.

“This award has brought a lot of attention to Kitchen of Love,” says Trice. “We need a truck, and Anne Keenan, who won the top award, donated children’s books to Kitchen of Love and said she would help us buy one to pick up food to replace the one that is 11 years old and just died.”

Trice adds that the new vehicle doesn’t need to be brand new or fancy, just reliable. She also would be happy for any strong volunteers to help lift boxes of food. “I do what I do because everyone needs a helping hand,” says Trice. “I’ve been blessed, and I want to be a blessing to others.”

For more information: 215-8684092, kitchenofloveinPA@gmail.com or kitchenofloveinpa.wixsite.com/kitchen-of-love. Donations may be sent to Kitchen of Love, 8500 Pickering St., Phila. PA 19150.