



By Keisha Reynolds

Imagine omelets served with sautéed mushrooms. Roasted zucchini mixed with reddened ripe tomatoes. A freshly tossed salad and homemade biscuits drizzled with gravy. Or, waffles smothered with fresh fruit.

Sound like a delicious fine-dining brunch experience? It is. But it's not what you think. A meal like this is regularly served-up by Steven Badt and his army of volunteers to some 200 homeless individuals each day at the Washington, D.C. human services agency—Miriam's Kitchen.

"I have the perfect job!" said Steve who started in the position in 2001 after developing his skills at top-notch, fast-paced restaurants like Icarus in Boston, Massachusetts and Hotel Tabard Inn in Washington, D.C.

Miriam's Kitchen was founded in 1983 in the Foggy Bottom area by churches who noted a huge spike in homelessness and mental illness. "Their intent was to get people out of the cold and give them a good start to their day," explained Executive Director of Miriam's Kitchen Scott Schenkelberg.

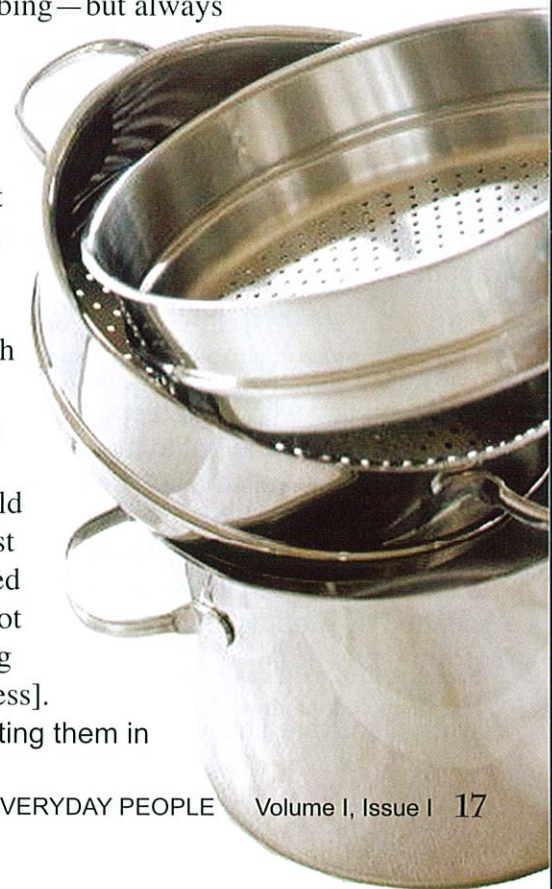
"What I wanted to do at Miriam's Kitchen was to turn a typical soup kitchen on its head," he reveals. "I wanted to basically blow-up the kitchen as it was and rebuild it from scratch. Some great chefs love food. I love the process...taking great ingredients and producing great food."

Steve's passion and know-how convinced the board to give him a try— "initially the board was nervous about it but I came in with guns blazing," he recalls. Although he didn't know if his experiment would work, he did know that he had the right mix of skills to pull off it off. "I wanted to do some good with what I knew after I started to burn-out in restaurant kitchens because of the pace and schedules. This is

when I started to transition to non-profits," tells Steve, who also returned to school to get his Master's Degree in Non-Profit Management at the University of Maryland, University College. Steve was more than ready to blend the two worlds he loved and to do what he suggested—cause a culinary explosion—one so big, it would attract the clientele and put them one step closer to receiving the services they needed.

From menus to greeting each person as a guest—Miriam's Kitchen is set apart from other soup kitchens by creating a welcoming atmosphere where people are more likely to use case management services. During the meals at least five case workers are "circulating on the floor, just talking to people and doing a little probing—but always respectfully," explained Schenkelberg. "Miriam's Kitchen isn't just about combining food with case management services. So much of what we do is about building relationships."

"We would never do food just to do food," added Steve. "We are not about just feeding them [the homeless]. We are about getting them in





Steve Badt (second from left) interacts with volunteers at Miriam's Kitchen.



with the food and connecting them with social services—and that's a beautiful equation in our minds." Steve seems to attract and breed success. Since he has been on-board, the organization has seen a rise in servicing homeless individuals from approximately 130 people a day to the current 200-person average. In fact, his team of volunteers is the kitchen's secret formula. Although Steve self-describes himself as demanding, some 1500 volunteers donate their time a year, while others hang-out on waiting lists for the opportunity to be a part of the team. Usually 500 volunteers work with him on a more regular basis, splitting themselves between kitchen and dining room server duties. Every day he schedules 24 volunteers and about 18 shows up—no small task as the arrival time is 5:45 a.m. so that hot meals can be served by 7 a.m.

"I say, let's go, let's move it!," laughed Steve about his interaction with volunteers. "When you're focused you got to push and got to move. I learned from great chefs and they yelled all of the time. They would say, 'that customer is about to buy a \$35 plate of lobster and it's got to be perfect.' I bring that type of pressure to the volunteers in the soup kitchen...and I'm surrounded by great volunteers that get satisfaction out of what they do."

Once clients are finally connected with needed ser-

vices, Miriam's staff notes that successes occur in a variety of ways. "Success is not only about getting permanent housing," said Schenkelberg although several of their program attendees have achieved that. "Success for us is may be keeping someone alive. When they don't have clothing, providing it for them or when they need medical treatment, connecting them with it. Success is keeping people who will always live in the streets healthy," he continued.

"I am very lucky to have a job that I love and that I'm paid to do," said Steve. 



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