



Facilitator — April/May 2011



Change Language: Choose



Text Size A | A | A

All translations are provided for your convenience by the Google Translate Tool. The publishers, authors, and digital providers of this publication are not responsible for any errors that may occur during the translation process. If you intend on relying upon the translation for any purpose other than your own casual enjoyment, you should have this publication professionally translated at your own expense.

RFMA GIVES

Megan Weadock and Sherleen Mahoney

RFMA Cares, Too

RFMA Gives reinvigorates the cause of a California soup kitchen

When the staff at the Restaurant Facility Management Association decided upon its slogan, "Get Connected," they weren't only envisioning a powerful, interconnected network of facility management professionals.

They were also hinting at the deeper, subtler goals of the association: to share ideas and experiences throughout the industry, to connect with each other and the restaurant industry's vendor partners, and to help create a better, more successful industry as a whole.

As part of that mission, RFMA Gives was born.

A Sense of Responsibility

Tracy Tomson, executive director of RFMA, said she became interested in social responsibility when she attended the American Society of Association Executives conference in 2007.

"At that time, the hot topic in the association world was social responsibility and how associations that bring people together should use their power and resources for the global good," she said. "I threw the idea out casually at a board meeting upon my return, thinking that we should figure out what we might be able to offer to the world. We were still such a young organization, trying to draft a strategic plan, build our membership, gain their trust and prove our worth; I think it was just too soon for us then."

Two years later, incoming RFMA Board Chair Bill Wallace was reviewing the association's growing asset base. He told Tomson that he felt it was time they considered what RFMA could offer beyond its profession and industry.

"I was thrilled to revisit the subject and felt it would address both of their desires to do something noble, as well as RFMA's internal focus on member engagement," Tomson said. "What better way to engage members and build loyalty to the association than to invite them to be a part of something that could make them feel good about themselves and the organization they are a part of?"

Next, RFMA formed a committee to determine what type of cause to embrace. A few conference calls and e-mails later, they honed in on the idea of renovating and repairing soup kitchens and other organizations whose goal is to feed the hungry.

By September of 2010, RFMA Gives was formed.

Someone Cares

The premise of RFMA Gives is to partner with an organization that relies on private donations and is not currently receiving state grants. Ideally, the opportunity also will allow as many RFMA members to be involved as possible. The preliminary plan is for one organization to be chosen every year in each RFMA conference city, and for 2011, it was in Orange County, Calif.

"I was sitting at my office in Austin, Texas, with little to no information about the Long Beach area when I began researching candidates," said Bailey Tomson, a volunteer with RFMA Gives and Tracy Tomson's daughter. "A handful of possibilities popped up, from a Salvation Army to a family support center. I felt like we could definitely

contribute to their success, but was worried our efforts to renovate with our specific resources would get lost among the many endeavors those organizations had undertaken. Someone Cares was one of the last options I looked into.”

It was the first two words of their mission statement that piqued Bailey Tomson's interest: “to feed.”

“I quickly realized that what RFMA Gives could do for this organization wouldn't merely solve a momentary problem or change one facet of their company for the better; we could immerse ourselves in every aspect of Someone Cares and give them the resources they needed to provide food and service to the people of the Costa Mesa community who needed it the most,” Bailey Tomson said.

The Someone Cares Soup Kitchen was founded 25 years ago with a mission to provide daily, nutritious meals to the homeless, unemployed, mentally and physically challenged, senior citizens and needy children in and around Costa Mesa.

Someone Cares began by serving 30 people a day. Today, the soup kitchen serves 250 to 300 meals a day, feeding 58 percent of Orange County's homeless.

After more than two decades in operation, Someone Cares needed equipment and facility upgrades to continue to serve its community effectively. RFMA members rallied in support of the renovation project, donating time, money and equipment to help complete the \$100,000 makeover.

Making Contact

When the first call was made to Someone Cares, there was some confusion, bewilderment and even some doubt on the other end of the phone line.

“You want to what? Meet with us to see if we might be a recipient of a kitchen remodel? Who is this, really?” they wondered.

But they agreed to meet with RFMA representatives to find out more about RFMA Gives.

Wallace said that on the initial visit, Shannon Santos, executive director of Someone Cares, and her staff could not believe the offer that seemed to have fallen from the sky.

“We were immediately smitten with their love for and the obvious impact that they had on their local community,” Wallace said. “As we walked around the building looking at the possibilities, we became more and more excited. ‘If we take this wall out here’. ‘Wow, they don't have a dish machine’. ‘Look at how cramped these walk-ins are’. ‘Hey, we could enclose the old bar area’. We were right at home thinking as facilities guys.”

After the tour, Wallace and Joe Robertson, Right Way Facility Services and also a RFMA Advisory Board member and founder of the Adera Foundation, sat down with Santos, who shared the story of Someone Cares. Santos' grandmother, Merle Hatleberg, started it on a shoestring budget 25 years ago after realizing how many people in her community were going hungry each day. Santos has carried on this vision, which is a testament not only to the joy and love they share for their community, but also of a mother instilling in her daughter and then her granddaughter the same open heart toward those neighbors who may have fallen on hard times. Not only do they serve hundreds of meals every day, but they also have an after-school tutoring program for children.

“And add to that the fact they were operating out of an old Chinese restaurant facility, it seemed to bring it all full circle, since renovating and repairing restaurants is exactly what our members do,” Tracy Tomson said. “That was the final barometer that made it apparent to me that this was the right place for RFMA Gives to get our start.”

After doing due-diligence to ensure Someone Cares' reputation in the community was as good as it appeared on the surface, Tracy Tomson had the pleasure of making the phone call to Santos to give her the good news that they had been selected.

“I felt like Ed McMahon on the Million Dollar Sweepstakes,” Tracy Tomson said. “Shannon screamed, laughed and cried and said, ‘Praise God!’ They honestly saw us as angels who came down from heaven to fulfill their wishes. It was a great feeling and it reinforced for me that we had made the right choice. We were going to be able to do things for them that they wouldn't have been able to do without us and that was our ultimate goal—to make a difference!”

Taking Action

After months of planning, RFMA members (and a few nonmembers) began work on renovating Someone Cares just weeks before the 2011 RFMA Conference.

"The goal was to allow them to effectively double the number of meals that they could produce," Wallace said. "They were serving about 300 meals daily and once they got used to the new equipment and layout, these efficiencies would allow them to grow that number substantially."

Throughout the project, local facility managers oversaw the work, and RFMA member companies donated new and used equipment and provided labor and materials.

"I could see they were working with some very old and undersized refrigeration equipment," said Don Langston from Air Rite, which specializes in commercial and industrial air conditioning and refrigeration.

The needs of the project quickly outstripped the budget, leaving Langston with a dilemma.

"We could not leave our portion of the project half done, so that led me to reach out to several of my key vendor partners to help with the project," he said. "We had a great response to my request for assistance from several manufacturers, and that helped us enhance the level of assistance we were able to provide."

Ron Ely, facility manager with Taco Bell, said three of the company's area technicians spent an evening working in the kitchen. Then, he sourced a used dishwasher and ice machine for the project from Tim Stockton with Pizza Hut. Meanwhile, Langston found suppliers to donate a new dishwasher, an ice machine and all of the refrigeration equipment for the two walk-in coolers and walk-in freezer.

"It was amazing how this was all coming together!" Ely said. "It was a pleasure to be a part of something that will benefit so many people for a long time."

Santos, the employees and volunteers of Someone Cares were thrilled with the results. The project doubled the kitchen's refrigerated space and created a state-of-the-art dedicated food space, enabling employees to serve even more meals per day. They can also use their volunteers in the new and improved prep area to get a jump start on the next day's meals.

The Power of Teamwork

For Robertson, who oversaw the project from beginning to end, the Someone Cares project represented a chance to look beyond himself.

"I wanted to get involved because I—and I think anyone else—feels better when they are less focused on themselves and focused on making a difference in someone's life," he said. "For me, life's biggest joy comes from helping other people. This was a project full of joy for me and everyone involved."

Like any good facility manager, Robertson, who owns a facility services company, approached the renovation with a carefully-considered plan.

"I evaluated the needs and developed a scope of work based on those needs," he said. "And I coordinated the volunteer forces and donations to accomplish the goal."

Craig Buck, a facility manager with Chipotle Mexican Grill, volunteered to help with the remodel as soon as he heard about the project.

"I've wanted to do something like this for many years, using my skills and knowledge in the construction and facilities industry to help others," he said. "So when I received the initial request for volunteers, I jumped at the chance."

Buck teamed up with five other Chipotle employees to work on the demolition, framing and drywall installation at Someone Cares. The satisfaction gained from helping people in need was well worth the effort, he said.

"The best part of it for me personally was seeing the smile on Shannon's face every day as she saw the progress and the ideas coming to life," he said. "To me doing something for someone who devotes their life to helping others was a pleasure, and I only hope that I can continue to participate in more of these programs in the future."

Robertson was equally pleased with the results—both for Someone Cares and for the RFMA members who volunteered.

"It was very successful," he said. "Everyone involved felt good about their participation. The facility now has the space to prep meals for more than 600 people and be ahead of the game for the following day. You can always tell when a humanitarian project is a success when the givers feel they got more than the recipients."

RFMA Gives members are in the process of choosing their next project for the 2012 conference in Las Vegas.

Look for more information on participating in the next project in the June/July issue of Facilitator.

[View All Articles](#)
