



2019: Volume III

# HEROES FOR HOPE: IN THE PEOPLE BUSINESS

Written by Jake Van de Walle, Brown University student & WSCC Intern



*You can always find Sean holding down the fort at Ohio City Pizzeria.*

Ohio City Pizzeria, part of the historical fabric of Cleveland's near west side neighborhood, underwent a facelift and a grand re-opening this past July, after being closed for a short time following the WSCC's purchase of the business and its restructuring as a social venture with the aim

of providing stable work experience for the Center's clients. It's only fitting that this Heroes for Hope column spotlights a person who is essential in making this building come alive not just as a top-notch pizza parlor in Ohio City, but as a focal point of strong community support. Over the two months since Ohio City Pizzeria

reopened its doors under the slogan "Great Food, Great Cause," Sean Paul has been running the show.

Sean's days at Ohio City Pizzeria are nothing if not busy. He sits me down at the bar in the front of the restaurant for our interview, offers me some water, and apologizes

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## DIRECTOR'S DIALOGUE: *Make it Personal*



"It's different if you guys do it. I don't feel judged by you, you can see my flaws and know my flaws and you wouldn't think less of me that I can't figure out math."

"Not only do I feel more comfortable with WSCC, but my kids feel more comfortable. They are stressed and nervous with new people and new agencies - I limit their interactions as much as I can."

These are just a couple quotes from a recent parent advisory meeting held here through our Family Engagement Program. The parents had suggested that we host a homework assistance program, and when our staff shared some options in the neighborhood, the above was how they responded.

Personal touch is important. I would argue that it is at the heart of what the West Side Catholic Center is to those it serves. This newsletter issue is a reflection of that. Not once have I felt like this was a place that was institutional in its approach. I remember being so excited as our renovations were coming to a close, and there was actually some sense of fear in the building that by having a space that was built for its intended purpose, that some of our uniqueness would be lost. This has not been the case because the people and the culture have remained the same. Face to face, nonjudgmental, personal. People are approached like prodigal sons and daughters, every time, regardless of if there is new drywall or the same old plaster walls.

I've been talking about pizza here for longer than you probably care to read; probably since the week I started here, to be honest. But it wasn't until June of this year that Sean Paul came into our lives. With all of the nuts and bolts that went in to making the Ohio City Pizzeria a reality, the thing it was missing was the personal touch. Sean brought us that, as you can see in this issue, and it somehow feels like he's been here all along.

Even the many ways people are so generous to our Center are based on personal touch. Whether you're a volunteer nurse giving of yourself, or a foundation making a site visit for the first time in awhile and seeing first-hand how we provide personal touch. Even "100 Women Who Care" was recently able to hear from volunteer Patty Cleary about her personal touches, resulting in thousands of dollars in donations through her story.

And who does the West Side Catholic Center "serve" anyway? It's not just who you think. Let's not forget the impact clients have on us as well. Personal touch goes both ways as long as we are open to it. Staff members Jenny and Rachel were open to it in that recent parent advisory meeting, and the responses they received helped illustrate what makes our Center special.

If you're looking to leave your mark on our Center, let us know how. There are plenty of opportunities, both upcoming and ongoing!

*In a spirit of service,*  
**John Litten, Executive Director**



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that he will be a little all over the place while we talk—it's 2:30 in the afternoon and he's cleaning tables to prepare for the afternoon wave of customers while connecting with the few customers already present at this late lunch hour. I prep my notes while Sean talks advertising with a representative from a local paper.

"How's business?" the newspaper rep asks him.

"Busy day. As you can see, the place is a mess," he replies cheerfully, gesturing at the empty tables loaded with plates left from finished meals.

In between tasks, Sean explains his background in the dining industry. A 2015 graduate of the EDWINS Leadership and Restaurant Institute (the third EDWINS class ever), Sean spent some time at Johnny Malloy's before working for two years as manager of the Eton location of B Spot Burgers, the famous Michael Symon burger restaurant. After a few members of EDWINS staff were brought on to assist with the Ohio City Pizzeria project, they reached out to Sean, who gave his notice at B Spot and came to Ohio City to work as the manager of the new venture.

"I really liked my job at B Spot," Sean told me, "but I always said that if I were to leave, it would be if I had an opportunity to do something with the team from EDWINS again. Everything lined up right, and I'm really glad I made the jump."

Sean's time at EDWINS, an organization with the aim of giving formerly incarcerated adults high-end culinary training and another shot at life out of prison, is a major influence on the work he does at Ohio City Pizzeria. As manager, Sean supervises a staff of WSCC clients, and he is personally acquainted with the unique demands of collaborating with people in vulnerable situations who face challenges entering the workforce. When I ask Sean about what the experience has been like for him, he talks about the workers with the consummate respect of someone familiar with their situation.

"A lot of people have been through a lot of hard times, and some of the situations that I come up with here I'm gonna have to handle differently than if I were to come up with them at a different restaurant," he tells me. "I just try and make sure everyone's comfortable here, and not too overwhelmed, because I know a lot of them use this to escape what they have going on outside of here. I don't want them to feel pressured or overwhelmed because



I know they have a lot going on outside of this place."

It's around this point in our conversation that a guest approaches to order a cocktail, and while she and Sean chat, I have a chance to look around and gather my thoughts. It's easy to imagine "this place" as an escape—I can hear soft Sinatra music coming from the speakers, a TV in the corner is playing subtitled ESPN in black-and-white, and the wall is decorated with historical pictures of the Ohio City neighborhood. At first glance, one wouldn't peg the restaurant as a social venture for the West Side Catholic Center, but in a mirror over the jukebox I catch a glimpse of a painting of St. Martin de Porres holding a cross in one hand and a basket of bread in the other.

There's just one table filled at this time of day—a family having a late lunch—but Sean still takes the time to check up on them and have a friendly chat about the food. It's clear he's just as attentive to the experience of his patrons as he is to that of his employees; he talks at length about wanting to establish Ohio City Pizzeria as a family-forward restaurant: a place that's approachable, kid-friendly, a source of positivity for everyone in the community. His passion for giving the neighborhood a place to come together over good food and shared love is tangible. Nothing works without the customers, he tells

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me, and it's clear he wants his guests to know they are an integral part of Ohio City Pizzeria. Everything about the place reflects this appreciation for the community, from the framed photos of the neighborhood lining the walls, to the specialty pizzas named "The Wildcat" (after the mascot of nearby Saint Ignatius High School) and "Engine #4" (because of the fire station across the street), to the classic recipes preserved directly from the menu of the old Ohio City Pizzeria.

When I ask Sean about how the restaurant will fit into the landscape of Ohio City, his face lights up.

"I think it's gonna be a great fit," he says. "There's not anyone around here doing what we're doing."

It's easy to see that he means it. Ohio City Pizzeria is a unique place in many ways—not just as a family-friendly restaurant with the aim of serving high-quality food, but as an environment designed to reach out to some of the most vulnerable members of the community and provide them with a point of stability and support. More than simply providing them a place to work, it gives them care and attention specific to their situation. The work is meticulous and the hours long, but listening to Sean talk about his employees, you know every second is worth it to him.

"Some of these people have never had any restaurant experience whatsoever. They go through their Workforce Development Program over at the Center, but we have to get them up to speed for work here at the pizza shop. It's a lot of hard work on their part to get to where they need to be, learning about wines and how to serve in a restaurant. The progress we've seen in some of these people from the first day they were here to today is remarkable. It's a lot of hard work on their part, it's a lot of hard work on our part—I don't have a stand yet, I'm sorry." (This last part is directed at an employee bringing a pizza order out from the kitchen. Not a moment of rest for the manager.)

In this moment it really strikes me why Sean is such a perfect fit for this Heroes

for Hope feature. Managing a place like Ohio City Pizzeria requires a kind of experience not found in the average restaurant, and the personal touch Sean brings to his work with the employees here is a gift unique to him. No matter what facet of the project I ask him about, one thing is clear: it's important to Sean that he give to the community in a way nobody else could. Outreach like the kind happening at Ohio City Pizzeria is never as simple as making sure the resources simply exist. Effective service requires a commitment to individuals and their unique circumstances. Sean brings that commitment to work every single day.

When I ask him about his hopes for the futures of the staff at Ohio City Pizzeria, Sean's response is instant.

"I just want to see them succeed. I just want to see them do what's best for them. You know, people don't stay in jobs forever, and I know that, but as long as they want to stay here, there's always going to be a place for them. When it's time for them to move on, it's time for them to move on, and I just want to see them grow, you know? In whatever they choose to do."

I get the chance to talk menu recommendations with Sean as we wrap up. He's a dining pro with a passion for food that I would have needed a whole separate interview to tap, and we talk about a lot of dishes. He does mention that he received an e-mail from a customer specifically writing to ask them to never change the recipe for the house salad. So if you're ever in the neighborhood and craving a

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## FOUNDATION SPOTLIGHT

### Highlighting the Incredible Organizations that Support Our Programs

Thanks to the generosity of the J. Harrington & Marie E. Glidden Foundation and other generous supporters, WSCC has operated a volunteer nurse clinic to assist our clients with their basic healthcare needs for almost 15 years.

The clinic operates on Monday and Friday mornings, generally serving 10-15 clients each day. Volunteer nurses provide our clients with a range of services: administering over-the-counter medications as needed; taking blood pressure and blood sugar readings (especially for diabetic clients); offering advice and counsel for many types of medical conditions; and helping clients navigate the healthcare system, referring clients to outside agencies if necessary.



Cleary speaking at a 100 Women Who Care event

We have been able to offer this program for our clients since 2005 thanks to the numerous volunteers that give of their time and talents to ensure that our clients receive such a basic need. Five volunteer nurses cover the clinic for the year, and they all agree that a huge part of what they do is actually just listening. Patients are often in search of an ear and a private space to share their story. Patty Cleary, who has volunteered with the program since its inception, believes that the nursing clinic makes a difference in the lives of WSCC clients. "Imagine having an ache or pain and no-one seems to care or wants to listen. We care. The little volunteer nurse clinic makes a difference in numerous small ways."

With the support of 100 Women Who Care, we received an additional sum of \$13,475 from 143 generous individuals from the group to further our efforts for this program and continue to provide these much needed services to our clients.

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good Italian salad and some caring company, swing by the pizzeria on Lorain Avenue. Odds are, you'll find Sean right here, running the house as only he can.

### IN THE FIRST 10 WEEKS OF BUSINESS:

- ★ 16,157 slices of pizza sold!
- ★ 4,048 second-chance hours worked!



### DONOR GRATITUDE

You can make donations to WSCC to celebrate a special occasion, to ask "in lieu of gifts" or to honor someone special. WSCC expresses gratitude for the recent donations made in memory of the following:

#### IN MEMORIAM:

David Bielinski  
Betty Gates  
Thomas Herman  
Michael Malbasa  
Gerald McBride  
Aloysius Mullee  
Brenda Weegar

To learn more about giving, contact the Advancement Department at [info@wsccenter.org](mailto:info@wsccenter.org) or ext. 132.



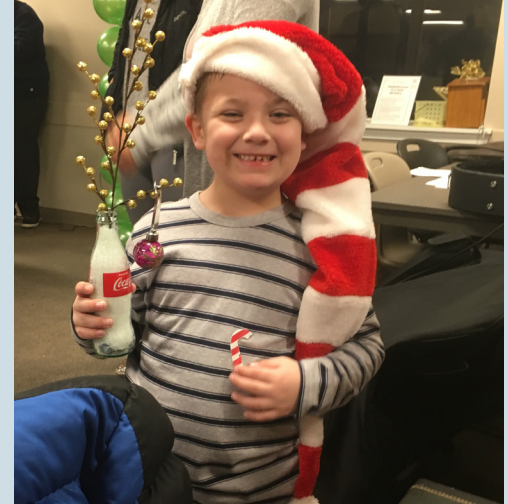
# ADVANCEMENT CENTRAL

## Spread warmth and joy this holiday season

Join us in collecting warm winter wear for our annual Spirit of Christmas celebration. With your help, we can gift 800 of our most frequent visitors with bags full of brand new items to keep them warm, and let them know that they're thought of during this special time of year. Thank you for helping us spread the Spirit of Christmas to those most in need!

We're collecting the following **NEW** items:

Men's & Women's	Sweatshirts, underwear (including boxers), socks, hats, & warm insulated gloves. (Sizes: M - 5X)
Boys' & Girls'	Sweatshirts, hoodies, underwear, socks, hats, & warm insulated gloves. (Sizes: 6 - 18)
Baby & Toddler	Sleepwear, hats & mittens, ointment, diapers, wipes. (Sizes: Newborn - 5T)
Full-Size Hygiene Items	Soap, shampoo, toothbrushes, toothpaste, deodorant, shaving cream, razors, combs/brushes, tote bags



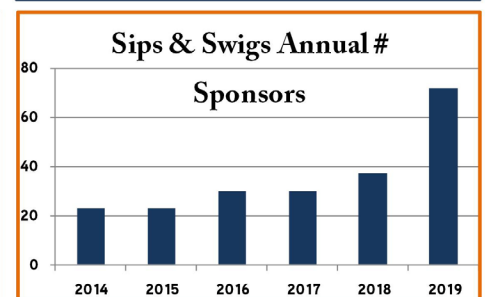
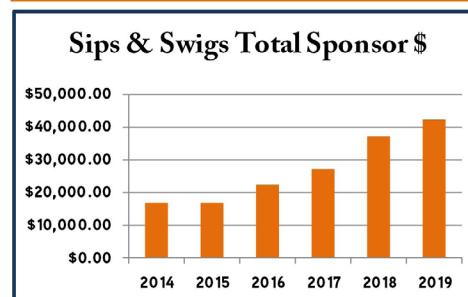
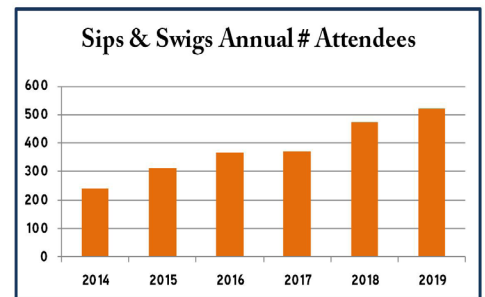
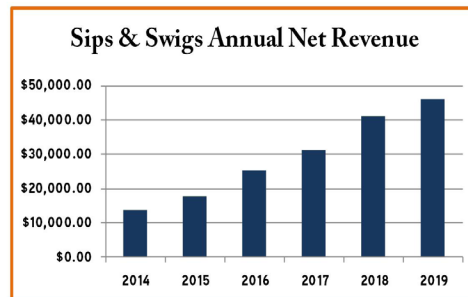
Hoping to spread more cheer? Please contact [vfavela@wscenter.org](mailto:vfavela@wscenter.org) to help Adopt-A-Family from our Zacchaeus Housing Solutions Program this Christmas.

Or, help us fund our programs at [wscenter.org/give](http://wscenter.org/give).

The dust from our 6th Annual Sips & Swigs has officially settled, and it was a record-breaking year! Thanks to all of our sponsors, volunteers, and attendees, we saw growth across the board. Our sincere thanks goes to everybody who supported this event, especially our Associate Board, who planned and hosted this event. Together, we made a massive difference in the lives of our clients. And what better way to support our mission than an evening of fun and goodwill? We can't wait to do it all again next year!



## Event History and Growth



# FAMILY, FOOD, & (LOTS OF) FUN!

Our Family, Food & Fun Summer Program, which addresses food insecurity during the summer months, brings families together for a hot meal and several fun activities and sends each family home with a stocked bag of meals and groceries for the week. This year's program concluded on Friday, August 9th, and it was another successful year!

**Total people served: 260**

**Total meals served: 1,230**

**Total child food bags distributed: 1,200**

**Total family food bags distributed: 300**

**Total number of children served: 181**

**Total families/households served: 53**

**Total backpacks with school supplies distributed: 100**



So many people and organizations are deserving of our sincere gratitude for their efforts in supporting this program. Thank you so much to:

Aladdin's on Carnegie  
Dave's Market (Ohio City)  
Kim and Jean Giberson  
Debbie Jarosz and Family  
Key Bank  
Dennis Kucler  
PNC  
The Sanson Company  
Pat Seifert  
Julia Sieck and Friends  
Pat Smith and Family

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## IT IS OUR MISSION :



West Side Catholic Center is grounded in faith, hope, love and respect for those we serve. We assist all who come in need of food, clothing, shelter, advocacy and a path to self-sufficiency.

"Not only do I feel more comfortable with WSCC, but my kids feel more comfortable. They are stressed and nervous with new people and new agencies - I limit their interactions as much as I can."

~ WSCC Client



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