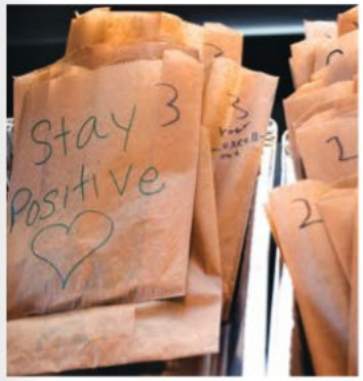

Comfort in Crisis

North Lake Tahoe nonprofit provides meals to needy.

WRITTEN BY **SUSAN WINTERS**

Early March 2020 looked promising for Rachel Graf, owner/operator of Auld Dubliner and Tremigo Mexican Kitchen & Tequila Bar in Olympic Valley. After its December 2019 launch, Tremigo had finally received its liquor license, and both restaurants were stocked in anticipation of a busy ski season at Palisades Tahoe.

On March 16, resort officials halted operations due to Covid. Realizing a community reliant on tourism would be devastated, Graf and her husband, Danny McCabe, head chef/kitchen manager of Auld Dubliner, refused to allow the restaurant staff and industrial kitchens to languish. They started a GoFundMe page and rallied staff and community members to provide free meals to the Tahoe-Truckee community.

"We had just gotten our bearings, and, luckily, we have an incredible staff that helped so much along the way," Graf says.

In a week they raised $15,000, garnered support and supplies from local businesses, and launched Sierra Relief Kitchen. On its April 16 debut, Graf expected to serve about 40 meals. Instead, she and SRK's 30 volunteers provided 120 meals of vegetarian lasagna. The following Thursday, they served 500 meals. Graf observed that many of their patrons included immigrants and small business owners who didn't qualify for government relief. Members of the First Baptist Church in Tahoe City drove church vans and volunteers used their own vehicles to deliver meals.

Throughout the pandemic, SRK volunteers provided hearty fare such as chile Colorado and Korean chicken with broccoli.

Post-pandemic, Graf continues overseeing Auld Dubliner and Tremigo while SRK, now a 501(c)(3) organization, has shifted gears to distributing meals as the need arises. For example, SRK volunteers took 45 fajita meals to Quincy firefighters during the Dixie Fire in 2021. Currently, SRK delivers meals to North Tahoe-Truckee Homeless Services on a weekly basis. In 2023, the organization's fourth year, its volunteers are set to provide pre-cooked Thanksgiving turkey dinners with stuffing, green bean casserole, and pie to families in need.

From left, founding members of Sierra Relief Kitchen, Randy Rogers (Tremigo and Dubliner owner/operator), Chris Gallagher (SRK board of directors), Antonio Abundiz (Tromigo head chef), Danny McCabe (Dubliner head chef), and Rachel Graf (SRK CEO/founder and Tremigo and Dubliner operator). Photo by Lou Manna. Middle and far right photos, Sierra Relief Kitchen volunteers prepare meals at Tremigo Mexican Kitchen & Tequila Bar in Olympic Valley during the pandemic shutdown of 2020, and distributing them to area residents in need. Photos courtesy of Chris Gallagher

THE ROAD AHEAD

By Graf's estimate, the SRK has served just shy of 25,000 meals to date.

"I did not realize the amount of food insecurity here in North Lake Tahoe. The cost of living has skyrocketed since the pandemic, and I can only imagine the need is much larger than expected," Graf explains.

Donations are needed for the nonprofit to make winter deliveries. Graf would love to connect with volunteers who have nonprofit backgrounds to expand SRK's services, outreach, and fundraising.

She says that due to the lessons learned during Covid, SRK remains ready "to react and respond in case of a crisis."

You may make a donation to Sierra Relief Kitchen via its GoFundMe page (Gofund.me/4f264837), or ask about adding a donation to your bill after your next meal at Tremigo Mexican Kitchen or Auld Dubliner Tahoe. For details, visit Sierrareliefkitchen.com.

Auld Dubliner
1850 Village South Road, Ste. 41, Olympic Valley
530-584-6041 • Aulddublinertahoe.com

Tromigo Mexican Kitchen & Tequila Bar
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