



Resident Feeds Off-duty Passion with Good Samaritan Meals

After a 12-hour Saturday shift at University of Miami/Jackson Memorial Hospital, which included a kidney transplant, a craniotomy, and two intestinal surgeries, Evan Peskin, M.D., M.B.A., looked forward to one last appointment. The anesthesiology resident dropped by his favorite bakery to box up leftover Italian breads, pastries, and pastas waiting just for him.



Dr. Evan Peskin picks up donated bakery goods from Giampiero De Persia, owner of Mamma Leone Bakery in Miami.

The next morning, his only day off that week, Dr. Peskin and his wife would deliver the donated bounty to the Lotus House shelter for homeless women and children – a weekly ritual that began nearly a year ago. That's when Dr. Peskin and two



friends, both Miami lawyers, founded Good Samaritan Meals, a small nonprofit with a big mission: Putting good food destined to rot in landfills into the mouths of the hungry.

“In my opinion, eating is one of life’s greatest pleasures,” said Dr. Peskin, whose passion for nourishing souls began in high school. “And I’ve never been hungry a day in my life. So, it just feels unfair that other people are, when so much good food is wasted every day – especially in the middle of a pandemic.”

Today Good Samaritan’s small but dedicated army of some 20 volunteers collects between 3,000 and 5,000 pounds of perfectly edible but hard-to-sell food from local grocery stores, restaurants, and bakeries every week. The volunteers then distribute their haul to such organizations as the Lotus House, Camillus House, Miami Rescue Mission, and the community refrigerators that another nonprofit, Buddy System, began installing in food deserts – neighborhoods with limited access to affordable, nutritious food – last summer.

Since then, Buddy System has connected Good Samaritan Meals to some of its most reliable volunteers, like Lily Winter, a UM sophomore who’s studying health sciences and plans to be a nurse practitioner. Every Friday night, Winter is among the 10 or so volunteers who collect hundreds of pounds of ripening produce, prepared meals, and other slightly imperfect products from the South Beach Trader Joe’s, Good Samaritan’s single biggest donor.

All you need is a car

“It’s not a chore. I really love it,” said Winter, who delivers the boxes she stuffs into her old Land Rover to the



community fridge in Coconut Grove and the Miami Rescue Mission. “It makes me happy knowing I am helping someone – even in this small way. I know it’s a tiny dent in a huge problem, but we need a lot of small dents to make a difference, and in this case, all you need to do it is a car.”



Evan and Abby Peskin deliver bakery goods to Lotus House chef Betty Forcer.

With such volunteers, Dr. Peskin could delegate his weekly visit to Mamma Leone Bakery in Miami’s Edgewater neighborhood. But even though he is about to complete an anesthesiology residency, then specialize in chronic pain management, he wouldn’t think of it. He and his wife, Abby Pooch Peskin, whom he met when they were juniors and now works as a therapist at the Miller School’s Mailman Center for Child Development, have grown too fond of owner Giampiero Di Persia and his wife, Benedetta, to abandon that routine.

“They were the very first people to support us and to see him makes my day better,” Dr. Peskin said, as he boxed up a tray of bombalone, which he described as Italian donuts that fill



rather than waste space on a hole. “If there were more people like them, the world would be a better place.”

For Di Persia, whose wife begins baking at 4 a.m., the feeling is mutual and built on a shared passion with the Peskins.

Making donations easy

“We don’t want good food to go to waste, and we like to feed people in need. But it was too hard for us to do on our own,” Di Persia said. “Evan and Abby thank us, when it is us who should thank them. We are blessed to have someone do the footwork. They take care of the donation part. They take care of the distribution.”

Making it easy for food producers to donate leftovers was a driving force behind Good Samaritan Meals, which derives its name from the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act. Congress passed the law in 1996 to incentivize food donation to nonprofit organizations by minimizing the liability of participating providers.

“Essentially what it says is that grocery stores, restaurants, bakeries, etc. that donate food to a nonprofit in good faith can’t be sued, if say, someone with an allergy has a bad reaction,” Dr. Peskin said. “There is no documentation of that kind of lawsuit ever happening within the U.S. legal system, but they are still protected from that liability.”

Yet, the law isn’t an automatic enticement for many businesses. One major food supplier Dr. Peskin tried to recruit turned him down, citing its corporate bureaucracy. The manager of another popular Miami bakery told him their food “was too good for the homeless.”



An early commitment

But Dr. Peskin is undaunted. He was committed to his cause long before he learned about the federal law, met his wife, or crossed paths with his partners, Jacob Schofield and Win Rutherford. Growing up in Cleveland, Dr. Peskin and his high school chums worked with Trader Joe's and small restaurants and bakeries there to donate food to a shelter for battered women and children.

Dr. Peskin and Schofield met while pursuing M.B.A. degrees, and the pair would drive around Miami handing out burgers they bought from Checkers and bananas, meal bars, and bottles of water from Publix.

"The first time it took us an hour and a half to hand out 100 meals, but once we knew where to go, it took us 20 minutes. So, we knew there was a need," Dr. Peskin said.

After Rutherford joined in, the trio decided to formally organize a nonprofit dedicated to reducing food waste and providing meals to people in need. Now, just 10 months later, a growing number of food producers and charitable organizations are grateful for the small army of Good Samaritans who enable them to help people who are struggling.

As she accepted the packages from Mamma Leone's on Sunday morning, chef Betty Forcer, the culinary director at the Lotus House shelter, already knew what to make with the baguette jutting out of one bag: croutons for the night's salad.

"Nothing they bring goes to waste," Forcer said. "And everything is appreciated."

To volunteer, donate food, or learn more, visit Good Samaritan



Meals, or follow the organization's efforts on Facebook or Instagram @goodsamaritanmeals.