

# When It Rains, It Pours

## A Story of Giving Back and How A Group of Chefs and Farmers Work Together to Make a Difference



It is astonishing how short of a time it takes for very wonderful things to happen. Perfect case in point occurred in October 2015 – you might recall, it was raining. A lot. So much in fact, that dams failed, lakes overflowed and many of our South Carolina neighbors in and around the Columbia area were driven out of their homes, totally displaced by rushing flood waters.

Chef Luca Annunziata of Passion8 in Charlotte heard the news and reached out to his fellow Piedmont Culinary Guild board members, wondering out loud what they might do to help. Through an active social media thread, the board reached out to the always quick to respond Piedmont Culinary Guild membership, a group made up of chefs, farmers and food based artisans and media in the Piedmont region of North Carolina. They used the hashtag #PCGCares, and this is how they roll...

As soon as the word went out, the response was strong, and scores of the Guild members, this food

writer included, responded with foodstuffs, portable grills, paper goods and plasticware, tents, tables, bottled water, and more. Chef Aaron Rivera of Tapas 51 even offered up his food truck, The Chrome Toaster. Not knowing what they would find, they wanted to be prepared to cook under any conditions, and a mobile kitchen was certainly perfect under the circumstances.

While PCG members were spreading the word via social media, texts and such; Passion8's GM Tori Bagdoian began the search for a location in Columbia to set up as home base. It was teamwork at its finest.

In less than ten hours, the question of "How can we help?" manifested itself into reality, and as the Guild's webmaster and media specialist Tom Petaccia tells it, "Member chefs, farmers, artisans, other members, and friends mobilized forces." Donations poured in as heavy and as fast as the rain had come and gone. By Tuesday morning, they were off. A group of six chefs on their way,

packed with enough food to cook for a couple of days.

Front runners chefs Luca Annunziata, Casey Griffin and David Hunt from Passion8 in Charlotte, Greg Collier from The Yolk in Rock Hill, and Aaron Rivera from Tapas 51 in Fort Mill headed to Columbia on Tuesday morning with donations of all shapes, sizes and food groups – fresh fruits and vegetables, eggs, protein bars, breads, herbs, water, beef – even a whole pig – all from scores of local farms, chefs, restaurants as well as produce and protein from food wholesalers such as US Foods, Pate Dawson Southern Foods and Inland Seafood who helped to make it all possible. When people wanted to know the best way to make a financial contribution, the Guild opened the PayPal donation portal on its website to make the donation stream run easier.

Tuesday evening the first meal was served to those who had to evacuate their homes in the Forest Acres and Irmo, South Carolina communi-

ties. The word spread via word of mouth and social media, and then the Columbia news picked up the story.

That evening the Columbia based CN2 news crew headlined the evening news with the words, "Local chefs may not know too much about flood clean up, but they know plenty about serving a good meal. Hundreds of people in Columbia are being fed by top chefs from our area. It's a little light in the midst of a real mess."

On Wednesday, lunch and dinner was not only served at Seven Oaks, but Chef Aaron Rivera loaded up his Chrome Toaster food bus to serve lunch at City of Hope Worship Center and A.C. Flora High School. Food was also delivered to Lower Richland High School and other locations in and around Columbia.

From there on out, lunch and dinner were served at Seven Oaks through Saturday – including a Thursday night Pig Pickin'! The plan had only been to stay through Thursday, but when Chef Dave Feimster from Fahrenheit offered to drive down a van load of water and food, and Pate Dawson Southern Foods agreed to drop off a delivery of fresh produce, the mission was able to continue through Saturday under the direction of Chef Casey Griffin. In the end it was five full days of really terrific, home cooked hot meals feeding some 1700 + displaced flood victims.

#PCGCares, and this is how they roll. Visit [PiedmontCulinaryGuild.com](http://PiedmontCulinaryGuild.com) for more information.



*Piedmont Culinary Guild is a grassroots effort to connect farmers and chefs. A gathering place and hub for innovative chefs, farmers, food artisans, culinary educators, and other local culinary professionals. Founded on the idea that sharing resources and promoting educational opportunities can help develop and secure our local food system, PCG is committed to sharing our strengths and building our local food economy.*



In addition to food, the SC storm victims also needed lots of helping hands working through the rubble; and Michael Rayfeild, Executive Banquet Chef at Ballantyne Hotel & Lodge and Chef at Culinary Corps, was there to lend a hand. Before coming to Charlotte, Michael lived in Columbia for 7 years. After the storm he went down each day with a set of tools, bottled water and a change of clothes to lend a hand to friends hit hard. He met his friend Mitch from Greenville, SC, and the two went door to door offering to help however needed. Together they helped clean up nearly a half dozen homesites.

Months later damage is still evident. Michael checks on the neighborhood periodically and reports that many are still not back in their homes, living in campers and trailers instead. Michael went down the first weekend in December to cook for a neighborhood group and lend a bit of holiday cheer.

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