

Lehigh Valley pizza truck serves almost 100 pies at Allentown Rescue Mission

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ALLENTOWN, Pa. — Dozens of men living at Allentown Rescue Mission got a taste of the “top shelf” last week, as J Rads Wood Fired Pizza held what it hopes will be a recurring celebration.

The cold and windy December evening was “the perfect time” to hand out a warm meal, J Rads owner and chef Tony Salvatore told LehighValleyNews.com.

He parked outside the Rescue Mission around 1 p.m. Dec. 3 and spent three hours firing up the oven.

“We tried to give them something that they don't get.”

Chef Tony Salvatore

Over the next two hours, he and his assistant, Sharon Diehl, served “just shy” of 100 gourmet pizzas and filled scores of bowls with soup — chicken orzo with bone broth — for mission residents.

“They loved everything,” Salvatore said as he and Diehl cleaned up the food truck after dinner service.

"We tried to give them something that they don't get," he said of his menu choices.

'Top-shelf stuff'

Allentown Rescue Mission this spring expanded its emergency shelter and now serves almost 150 people across its shelter, transformation program and the Clean Team Workforce.

The Clean Team was launched about 15 years ago to offer mission residents stable employment.

The mission serves its residents three meals per day — about 1,700 total meals each week, according to its website.

"But I'm sure they're on a tight budget," Salvatore said, sharing his pride in serving mission residents "top-shelf stuff" for at least one meal.

Salvatore said he wanted to feed people at the mission because he's long heard about the organization's impact.

"One day, [we'll] have the whole block" filled with food trucks.

Chef Tony Salvatore

He grew up near Sixth and Tilghman streets, about a mile north of the mission's headquarters on Hamilton Street.

"I always wanted to feed the homeless, but never had the chance — always too busy," Salvatore said. The change in seasons gave the chef some time, and he took it.

Salvatore hopes the pizza-and-soup night is a long-lasting memory for residents — and he plans to return with more support.

"One day, [we'll] have the whole block" filled with food trucks, he said.

Salvatore also credited Andrew Gellis for helping with the event.