

Open Hand Launches Expansion Beyond SF

Project Open Hand has announced the acquisition of new kitchen facilities for its meals delivery program which may be expanded to the Bay Area. Director Ruth Brinker praised Chevron USA for their grant of \$125,000 that went for a down payment on the new building.

Project Open Hand, the first and only service of its kind in the nation, prepares and delivers meals to people with AIDS and ARC who are home-bound. The new headquarters and kitchen facilities will enable the service to expand its deliveries to Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin,

San Mateo and Santa Clara counties.

Brinker announced Mar. 8 that Project Open Hand has made a down payment on a building at 2720 17th St. in San Francisco thanks to the contribution from Chevron. She unveiled architectural drawings of the remodeling



Ruth Brinker and a chef prepare food for delivery for Project Open Hand

of the 5,000 square foot headquarters and kitchen facility.

In a unique demonstration of public-private cooperation, Mayor Art Agnos announced a \$50,000 grant from the city to permit Open Hand to purchase kitchen equipment for its new facility.

Brinker said the new facility will allow Open Hand to expand its capacity to cook more than 2,000 meals a day.

"This is both a very happy and very sad day for us," Brinker noted. "We are excited about our new home, but the sad reason we had to find a larger space is because the number of AIDS and ARC clients is growing and we need the expanded kitchen space

to cook for them."

Currently, Open Hand feeds almost 350 people daily in San Francisco who are too ill to cook for themselves.

Brinker said the target date for Open Hand to move into the new facility is July 1. Until the move, the group will continue to operate from the kitchen of Trinity Episcopal Church in San Francisco while its new home is refitted as a working kitchen.

Open Hand's new home cost \$545,000. Brinker said the organization needs continued funding to pay for the building and to finance the cost of constructing and equipping the new kitchen facilities.

"We have taken the first step to help Open Hand purchase a new home," said Bill Steele, Chevron's public affairs manager. "We hope others will join with us in contributing to this outstanding organization."

Brinker noted Chevron gave the first major corporate donation to Open Hand and is a national leader in the corporate fight against AIDS. She said the group is seeking donations from other major corporations and grants from foundations.

Founded in late 1985, Brinker started the program after one of her friends died because he was too weak from AIDS to cook for himself. "I decided that no one should go through that," she recalled.

Brinker began Open Hand by cooking and delivering the food herself. As her client list increased she found she needed additional help, such as chefs, kitchen helpers and sandwich-makers.

Since then, Open Hand's volunteer staff has grown to 200 people who traverse San Francisco with deliveries of a bag lunch and a hot dinner meal.

Eighty-five percent of the meals delivered by Open Hand are free to recipients who through their illness have exhausted their financial resources.

Project Open Hand's annual budget comes from private donations and fundraisers. Donations for Open Hand can be sent to 1668 Bush St., San Francisco, CA 94109. For more information or to volunteer, telephone 771-9808.

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P. 16

S. F. EXAMINER - ROB MORSE

8/2/87

P. A - 2

TWO MONTHS AGO I reported that S.F. Supervisor John Molinari had procured a new van for Ruth Brinker, a remarkable woman who for two years has been delivering meals to housebound AIDS patients — in recent months she has delivered 460 meals a day to 230 people. Alas, Thursday morning the new van was parked at Trinity Episcopal Church, Brinker's home base, when it was stolen. Insurance coverage was minimal, so the van cannot be replaced. Ruth Brinker, one of the class acts in this city, needs a new van, and I'm sure there are other class acts out there. Contributions may be sent to Project Open Hand, 1668 Bush St., S.F. CA 94109. If you have a van you don't need, don't hesitate to call 771-9808.

Trinity's good Samaritan of AIDS

Powerhouse Brinker's open heart, open hands

By Caroline Drewes
OF THE EXAMINER STAFF

WHO IS this woman who has been feeding all these people all these years?

Spectacles shoved up to lodge firmly in her crisp, brushed-up gray hair, Ruth Brinker is a serene presence as she moves through the anteroom adjoining her office, past the sporadic buzz of the printer, past long trestle tables neatly spread with 500 slices of bread from the Tassajaro Bakery.

She is heading for the kitchen down the hall, a high-ceilinged chamber that has outgrown its boundaries; hence the sandwich-making (salami today) in her quarters.

Brinker is the gentle-voiced powerhouse behind Project Open Hand, a nonprofit ecumenical organization operating out of Trinity Church's parish hall on Bush Street, where daily meals are prepared and delivered to AIDS and ARC victims too weak to feed themselves, not ill enough for the hospital.

Her program officially began after the Labor Day weekend two years ago; today it cares for more than 325 "clients."

And today its founder is receiving not only local but national recognition for her work.

On Wednesday (after a full day of activities here) Brinker will fly to Washington, D.C., to take part in events connected with the mammoth six-day gay rights rally beginning the next day.

Accompanied by Irving Zaretsky, retired Princeton professor of anthropology and chairman of her board of directors, she will receive an award from the National AIDS Network, a referral agency.

And on Oct. 11, plans call for her to join comedians Whoopi Goldberg and Robin Williams in reciting the names of AIDS victims inscribed on a giant quilt made up of panels sent from all over the country to the Castro to be stitched together and carried like a banner during the demonstration.

Friends will tell you that what motivates Ruth Brinker in accomplishing her unique service is a true sense of altruism. Quite simply, she is a good Samaritan, working seven days a week, 365 days a year. She herself will tell you that Open Hand was inspired — dictated, really — when a friend died because he was too spent from the effects of AIDS to feed himself.

She was running Meals on Wheels at the time, having started as a volunteer. That organization's charter confines it to the feeding of people over 60; Ruth took on the new AIDS program alone.

She had \$4,000, half given by the Zen Center, the other half by the Golden Gate Business Association. It's been a fight for operating funds ever since, as the list of those in need of her services has grown.

"We lose people," Brinker says, "but the numbers who need us constantly keep climbing. ... There are flurries of checks, and we have an anonymous benefactor who gives us an annual \$24,000, that pays a month's expenses. We need money."

Those who can, pay \$4.50 for lunch and dinner. Some 80 percent can't afford to pay anything. Yet, "somehow or other, we've never had to say no to anyone. ... There are contributions of food from caterers and food photographers and from restaurants — Zuni's,



Examiner/Katy Raddatz

Project Open Hand founder Ruth Brinker

for instance, and the Hayes Street Bar and Grill. There is a roster of five chefs who come from places like Chez Panisse and Zuni's, who are paid and who each come one or two days a week."

There are also paid kitchen helpers and a sandwich-maker. And there are many, many volunteers, more every day (Brinker started with seven.) The volunteers, along with one paid driver, deliver hot dinners packed in aluminum foil containers and bag lunches for the next day.

Open Hand has two vans. Once there was only one, procured a few months ago by Supervisor John Molinari. When that van was stolen from in front of the church, an indignant Vincent Fria, the real estate tycoon, sent a replacement. Then the original was recovered by Sausalito police. When Brinker telephoned Fria with the news, his reaction was as immediate as his reply. "It's quite clear to me that you need two."

Ruth Brinker and her cause are apt to affect people that way.

One morning this week, wearing a smart gray flannel suit with a white cashmere sweater, she conducted a tour of her facilities.

Down the hall, in Trinity's ground floor, there was a feeling of vitality and good will pervading the kitchen where Christopher Medina, David Griggs, John Perry, Jeffery Chapman and Sara Brinker, Ruth's daughter and right hand, were speeding about their chores — deftly slicing cheese, peeling hard-boiled eggs, boiling noodles, concocting salads. Beef stroganoff was the entree; it looked and smelled delicious.

"We use all fresh vegetables, no processed foods," said Ruth. "I think I'm serving some of the best food in town. It's how we show the

guys we care."

She came originally, some 30 years ago, from the Chicago area, out of a sense of adventure. Once here, she talked her way into writing a newspaper column on dogs. "I'd been brought up where everyone had horses and dogs. I knew a great deal about them."

Ultimately, weary of dog shows, she gave that up for the antique business, about which she also knows a great deal.

She lost her husband 15 years ago, reared two daughters, the younger of whom, Lisa, is working on a degree in child psychology from Antioch. Home is a North Beach apartment, also shared with 11-year-old Max Corso, son of the former Beat poet Gregory Corso (The poet is now teaching at an Italian university.)

Corso's life, as Ruth tells it, is a Hollywood scenario that includes a childhood as a runaway on the streets of New York, prison, protection from the Mafia, and several subsequent years of study with Archibald MacLeish's creative writing program at Harvard. But that's another story.

Max arrived in the arms of his father at the age of 1½. Gregory was having a difficult time dealing with parenthood; it was his friend Lisa Brinker's idea that the little boy stay with her family. And, never formalized in any way, it has been a happy arrangement for all hands ever since.

Ruth Brinker was running Meals on Wheels from the same Trinity Church kitchen when San Francisco's initial homeless crisis developed. She started the Trinity Food program.

'We lose people. But the numbers who need us constantly keep climbing'

— Ruth Brinker

She's receiving local and national recognition for her work

"I learned to make oatmeal with raisins for 450 people. Then after a year and a half the vestry closed down the operation. They said it had outgrown the facility. I felt they just didn't like seeing those people come to the door. It kind of broke my heart when it ended."

She speaks her mind, this quiet-mannered woman. And she has laughter in her gray eyes, when it's the time for that.

"When I decided to do the Open Hand Project, I decided Trinity Church was not going to be a part of it, so I asked Geoffrey Link and the San Francisco Study Center to be my fiscal agents until I could get my own nonprofit status."

Trinity's Rev. Robert Cromeey "is very supportive. He feels we are the star in his crown and he tries to take credit whenever he can. I have to slap his wrist occasionally."

In the beginning, "With the help of my seven volunteers, I did the cooking and preparing with one hand while doing Meals on Wheels with the other. ... All this takes determination and I get an enormous amount of pleasure out of it. When someone gets out of a hospital skeletal and in a few months has put his weight back on and tells you, 'You've saved my life,' it's a good feeling."

Her longtime friend, restaurateur Stanley Eichelbaum, whom she has assisted part time for a number of years, was given Ruth's name by a mutual friend in New York when he first arrived here.

He says she throws herself into whatever she does, that she is never late, that her present work is a self-fulfilling thing. She says it is energizing. And she keeps getting new ideas. For instance, "tying in to the court system." Many a vegetable has been chopped in the Open Hand kitchen by someone working off a traffic ticket.

"They have fun, too," says Ruth Brinker.

First Corporate Gift

Chevron Donates \$125,000 to Open Hand

S.F. SENTINEL
12/25/87
P. 11

Chevron USA Inc. has made a major donation to Project Open Hand, the first and only meal service in the nation for people with AIDS and ARC, that will allow the organization to purchase a permanent headquarters with kitchen facilities, according to Ruth Brinker, founder and director of Project Open Hand.

"This contribution of \$125,000 will assure our ability to help those who cannot help themselves," said Brinker. "While we still need donations to purchase food and supplies, this grant gives us the stability to grow and serve more individuals."

Open Hand, which feeds almost 300 people daily with AIDS and ARC, was in danger of being without kitchen facilities until Chevron contributed \$125,000 to purchase property with kitchen and office space.

"We hope there will be other donors who will add to Chevron's outstanding contribution," Brinker said.

"This is an important gift to a vital organization," said Bill Steele, Chevron's public affairs manager. "This money will allow Open Hand to find a real home and to expand its services."

"For some the greatest gift at Christmas time is simply a hot meal," Steele added. "Chevron is pleased to be able to help fund a program that provides meals 365 days a year to people who are too weak to make their own."

Project Open Hand, based in the kitchen at Trinity Episcopal Church at Gough and Bush Streets in San Fran-

cisco, must move at the beginning of 1988 because the church needs the space for its own uses, according to Brinker.

Open Hand has placed a bid on an undisclosed property. The group should know in the next few weeks if the bid will be accepted, Brinker said.

Founded by Brinker in late 1985, the nonprofit Project Open Hand is staffed by 60 volunteers who traverse San Francisco with deliveries of two hot meals to each client between 4:30 pm and 6:30 pm daily.

Brinker started the program after one of her friends died because he was too weak from AIDS to cook for himself. "I decided that no one should go through that," she recalled.

Brinker and Project Open Hand have been honored with awards from the National AIDS Network, Americans Who Care and KRON's Those Who Care award.

Open Hand's annual budget comes from private donations and fundraisers. Chevron's contribution is the first corporate gift to the organization. Donations for Open Hand can be sent to 1668 Bush St., San Francisco, CA 94109. ■