



The Open Door  
Julie LaFontaine, President and CEO  
28 Emerson Ave.,  
Gloucester, MA 01930

Media Contact: Kelsey Bode  
Email: [kelsey.bode@foodpantry.org](mailto:kelsey.bode@foodpantry.org)  
Phone: 978-283-6776 x 226

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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# Local Families Turn Grief into Good

**Sponsored Meals Help Alleviate Hunger in Memory of Loved Ones**



*Dennis Acker places labels on Friday's Community Meal which read "This meal is donated in loving memory of Charlene Acker." (Photo Courtesy of The Open Door)*

GLOUCESTER – A local family is honoring a loved one today by putting dinner on the table for those in need of a little extra help.

Friday's Community Meal at The Open Door, a hearty ham, pineapple, vegetable stuffing, and mashed potatoes dinner, is given in loving memory of Charlene Acker by her husband Dennis Acker and daughter Maya Acker, and her father LeRoy Ross.

Charlene Acker, age 57, passed away in October 2021 from ovarian cancer. Today would have been her 58<sup>th</sup> birthday.

With her birthday approaching, Dennis Acker saw the opportunity for meals sponsorship on social media.

"The minute I saw it, I knew I had to do it. It was just perfect, and I can't think of a better way to honor her birthday," Acker said, adding he has a few other plans this week to honor Charlene.

The Acker roots run deep with The Open Door. Several years ago, when their daughter, Maya Acker, began looking for community service opportunities in high school, The Open Door was a natural pick as Dennis Acker had served two terms on the nonprofit's Board of Directors, and the family had volunteered together through the years. For Maya Acker, volunteering in the kitchen to prepare dinners on Saturday night worked well with her high school schedule. Charlene Acker volunteered alongside her daughter, and it became a special activity for both of them.

The Community Meals program sponsorship opportunity is a new initiative at The Open Door, first inspired by another family's annual tradition.

"We launched our Community Meals sponsorship opportunity as a way for anyone to sponsor a meal, whether they be a local business, community group, a family, and so on," President and CEO Julie LaFontaine said. "To turn one's grief into an act of kindness and to put food on the table for someone else pays tribute to the life of a loved one and makes a difference. We take this honor as a responsibility, and we are thankful to the families who choose to remember their loved ones in this way."

The initiative is inspired by another local family who honor a loved one each year with a meal at The Open Door. For the last four years the Testaverde family has come together to honor the late Capt. John S. Testaverde by sponsoring a Community Meal, including his wife Jean Testaverde; children Nina Testaverde Goodick, Theresa Testaverde, John Testaverde, and Mary Marcantonio; and his loving grandchildren. The group bring a cake to be sent out along with the meals, sometimes flowers, and some even sign up to deliver meals.

As a lifelong fisherman with a passion for cooking for family and friends, Capt. Testaverde taught his children to always cook with love.

"It was a wonderful, positive way to honor the memory of our father," said Goodick of a previous year's meal. "Our whole family appreciated it, and it brought joy to us, allowing us to remember him by feeding others. He was all about the food. I'm sure my family will laugh that I said that. We know he would love this."

While groups that once volunteered to prepare meals in-person at The Open Door kitchen are not currently able to amid the ongoing pandemic and precautions limiting the number of people in the building at a given time, The Open Door is making the Community Meals program sponsorship a formalized option for those looking to feed their neighbors in another way.

To learn more or sponsor a Community Meals program sponsorship, visit [FOODPANTRY.org/sponsormeals](https://FOODPANTRY.org/sponsormeals).

### **About The Open Door**

The mission of The Open Door is to alleviate the impact of hunger in our community. We use practical strategies to connect people to good food, to advocate on behalf of those in need, and to engage others in the work of building food security.

Founded in 1978, The Open Door is a 501 (c)(3) tax exempt nonprofit and community food resource center for low-income residents of Gloucester, Rockport, Manchester, Essex, Ipswich, Hamilton, Boxford, Rowley, Topsfield, and Wenham. In 2020, The Open Door helped stabilize the lives and health of 9,681 unduplicated people from 4,703 households through the distribution of 2.46 million pounds of food, amounting to 2.05 million meals. Requests for food assistance during this pandemic year were up 27 percent.

For more information, visit [FOODPANTRY.org](https://FOODPANTRY.org).

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