



HONORING DR. KING THROUGH SERVICE

by Vanessa Tammaro

As many of our friends and family know, the Academy is open for all major holidays. Depending on the holiday, we might celebrate with a feast or, as is the case for Martin Luther King Jr. Day, we find ways to serve our community. This year, our two campuses each organized their own service project.

Our Sarasota colleagues spent the day at Phillippi Estate Park. They started the unseasonably chilly morning off with a hot cocoa bar that they enjoyed around the warmth of a portable fire pit. Once everyone was sufficiently cozy, they began the work of beautifying the park. At trailheads and around the lake, they collected trash - from paper cups and cans to plastic bags and cigarette butts. Members and staff, and even a family member, filled multiple bags with trash and left the park far better than they found it.

In Manatee County, Academy at Bradenton members and staff met at Salvation Army. Some of us got to work sorting children's clothes and other donated items while others did yard work, weeding and picking up trash outside. We packed a cooler of sandwiches, chips and water and all sat down together to have lunch and enjoy each other's company. We donated our leftover food to the Salvation Army hoping to help feed people in need. We all enjoyed ourselves and did our best to honor the legacy of Dr. King by being of service to our local community.



Phillippi Estate Park



Salvation Army

WARM WELCOME TO ALICIA VELEZ

by Alicia Velez

I have always considered myself to have a heart for service. Since my early teens, I've worked in the kitchens of healthcare agencies and found comfort in giving myself to those who find themselves at the end of life, often alone. But the institutional nature of that work weighed heavily on me. I often felt that I could be doing more, and I wondered what was next for me.



When I moved to Florida last year and began my job search, I discovered the Academy. Upon touring the facility, my mind was blown. I couldn't believe such a place existed! I knew immediately that I wanted to be a part of this unique team. From day one, I have felt privileged to walk through our doors. For me, food is love; it creates lasting memories and it forges community. Every day I experience some moment (or two!) with our members that puts me deeply in touch with my gratitude for being here. Culinary Instructor at the Academy at Bradenton is by far the most rewarding job I've ever had. It can be challenging of course, but in all the best ways. I wouldn't want to be anywhere else.

When I'm not at the Academy, I spend time with my family and try to be on the water as much as I can. For the first time in a long time, I feel like everything I need is right here.



(L to R) Alicia Velez and Nathalie Estiverne in culinary

PREACHING TO THE CHOIR

by Erica Siegel

This week the Academy presented at Temple Emanu-El here in Sarasota and it was a wonderful experience. Several members and staff spoke, including our executive director William McKeever, members Kevin Geyer and Ian Churchill, and our culinary instructor Ben Burnside. We even had a member's grandmother speak about the transformational change she has seen in her grandson since he joined the Academy.



Erica Siegel (R) on stage presenting about the Academy



Members, staff, family and Academy-made desserts

When it was my turn to speak, I started by telling my history with mental health and deafness. It was so freeing to be able to speak honestly about what I've been through. I feel very grateful to have had the opportunity to do so. I did speak last year at an Academy fundraiser but that was mostly people I know. Every time I tell my story, it gets easier and my confidence increases. To top it off, the Academy's culinary team made some incredible desserts. People were just raving! I think it was a very successful evening, and I hope we get to do it again soon.

WELLNESS IN MOTION

by Joseph Lewis

When I heard fellow member Torre Blakney talk about wanting to start a Boot Camp for physical wellness, I was all in! We met and discussed a workout routine that would be fun, effective, and suitable for beginners. Once we had our exercises picked out, we chose a date and time and created a sign-up sheet.



(L to R) Joseph Lewis and Torre Blakney leading their workshop

When the day came, I wasn't sure if anyone would actually show up, but they did! With help from our wellness coordinator Brooke DePuy, Torre and I led the class. We made sure to include a pre-workout stretch! We did push-ups, sit-ups, jumping jacks and squats. Everyone seemed to be having fun and when it was over, we were told by several members that they felt a lot better. For our next workshop, we want to teach members how to make healthy smoothies. Stay tuned for more healthy fun!

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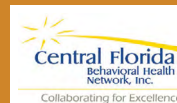
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