



GET TO KNOW

Mercy Chefs

Mercy Chefs is a 501c3 nonprofit founded in 2006 in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. The organization exists to provide professionally prepared, restaurant-quality meals to victims, volunteers, and first responders in natural disasters and national emergencies, and partners with existing ministries with food service in underserved communities around the country.

Since Mercy Chefs' founding, we have served over 25 million meals in response to over 200 natural disasters in 29 states and territories and 20 nations with the help of over 15,000 volunteers. The last three years have marked a significant increase for Mercy Chefs. COVID-19 created a new set of challenges for Americans facing food insecurity. Mercy Chefs responded promptly with the launch of our grocery box distribution program, providing millions of meals monthly in addition to our existing disaster relief response and community kitchen outreach.

For every one person we feed, we learn of three more who are hungry. We know we must do more. As the need increases daily around the globe, Mercy Chefs is committed to expanding to meet the needs of others. For more information, please visit mercychefs.com.

Areas of Focus

DISASTER RELIEF AND LONG-TERM RECOVERY

We respond to natural disasters and emergencies across the country and around the globe at a moment's notice. Our professional chefs prepare high-quality, hot meals on a mass scale for victims, first responders, and volunteers out of our mobile kitchens strategically staged around the country. We are also equipped to provide clean water and other basic necessities.

COMMUNITY KITCHENS

Mercy Chefs' CoFounder, Ann LeBlanc, inspired the development of our Community Kitchens and Outreach division. She recognized our organization's responsibility to put our resources, volunteers, and skills to use outside of disaster to feed food-insecure populations across the nation. In 2019, Mercy Chefs launched its first permanent community kitchen in Portsmouth, VA as the model for a program that so far has been replicated in Nashville, TN, Dallas TX, and Richmond, VA, with many more to come.

FOOD INSECURITY RESPONSE

Mercy Chefs has delivered millions of meals through grocery box distribution. The impact these groceries, filled with pantry staples, fresh produce, and protein, have made on people's lives is unparalleled. We've expanded this program and continue to find new ways to support people in food-insecure communities through job skills training, single-parent cooking classes, and budget recipe creation.





After 35 years in the hotel-restaurant business, Chef Gary LeBlanc unexpectedly discovered his passion while volunteering in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

As Chef Gary describes it, he watched from his television in Portsmouth, VA as the hurricane hit his hometown of New Orleans, LA. Seeing people he recognized standing on overpasses in the hopes of being rescued and watching the report of his daughter's neighborhood, completely underwater, struck him in a way nothing had before. Immediately, he knew he had to help.

Chef Gary volunteered with every agency he could find to do food service for those displaced by the hurricane. What he witnessed during his short-term volunteer experience compelled him to be a part of a lasting impact in the field of disaster relief. This ultimately changed the entire trajectory of his life. As he describes it:

Hurricane Katrina created chaos that our country had never seen before: Americans fighting for their lives, city-wide devastation, children without water and a public failure of our federal and state governments to respond. The community was in ruins and recovery seemed out of reach. It was there in the midst of the chaos that I realized the incredible difference a hot meal can make, and at the same time, I was struck by the lack of care put into the relief meals.



In Cajun culture, food is love. Chef Gary grew up watching his Cajun grandmothers cook for every occasion and often for no reason at all. The contrast between his childhood experience and the food he saw being served to the victims of Hurricane Katrina shocked him. No love or passion was being put into the meals. It was all about being fast, inexpensive, and in mass quantity.

Months after returning to Virginia, broken by what he had witnessed in New Orleans, Chef Gary was again moved to take action. He felt a personal call to "just go feed people." It seemed all of the years he had spent in the hospitality industry had been leading him to this moment. Chef Gary became inspired by the possibility of serving restaurant-quality meals to victims, first responders, and volunteers in a disaster zone on a mass scale.

In just a few months, and with his wife's support and prayer, Chef Gary turned his passion for feeding others into a humanitarian and disaster relief organization called Mercy Chefs.

In the 17 years since, Mercy Chefs has served over 25 million meals for victims, volunteers, and first responders in natural disasters and national emergencies.

Mercy Chefs is constantly expanding across the United States and around the globe with relief aid, permanent kitchens, water projects, and community outreaches.

As Chef Gary says, "Every time I see a disaster strike around the world, it takes me back to Hurricane Katrina, and I know I have to help. Something has to be done, and I'm in a position to do it. So, I do."

Chef Gary's entire family, including his wife, Ann LeBlanc who serves as Mercy Chefs' CoFounder and President, is involved in Mercy Chefs in one way or another. He has taken great pride in watching his children develop compassion for others through service. When he is not working, Chef Gary loves spending time with his five children and seven grandchildren.



Additional Resources

To learn more about who we are, what we do, and how to get involved, please visit mercychefs.com or our social media profiles for the most up-to-date information on our deployments and day-to-day activities.



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Please reach out to mercychefs@hodgespart.com with any questions.