



Meet Jenifer Payne and Mike Rodrigues founders of Been There A Community Café and The Center of Gratitude

Describe Your Business:

Mike and I run both the Center of Gratitude, a peer run non-profit founded to build a stronger community by serving those living with mental illness and Been There A Community Cafe, the cafe founded to help support The Center of Gratitude and to work toward building a stronger Montour Falls by bringing life back to a number of locations on Main Street and by offering sustainable and affordable meal options to the community year round.

Tell us your story:

Been There A Community Cafe was born out of opportunity. Mike and I had founded The Center of Gratitude (CoG) and opened it down the street in October of 2018, the same month that the long running Harvest Cafe closed. Center of Gratitude was founded with the mission of building a stronger community by supporting those living with mental illness. The core principal is people helping people. As Center activities grew, we began looking for a space that offered multiple meeting rooms and more privacy when needed for peer support. We learned that the owners of the Harvest Cafe were unsure of the fate of the cafe and that they were looking to sell the entire building.

Jen immediately had a plan, as she often does. She wanted to move CoG into the upstairs of that building, open the cafe, and use the income and traffic generated to help support the Center. The question was, how could we run a cafe that supports our mission? After much discussion, a plan for the Community Cafe was born, the key being we would support the community who is living with hunger and build a stronger Montour Falls by bringing life back to the buildings on Main Street.

We knew right away that the menu would be simple and affordable and Been There has two programs designed to be sure that nobody leaves here hungry. Our first and most used program is our "Community Meal" program which allows guests to purchase a meal for another member of the community. We place tickets for the meals into our "Community Cookie Jar" and then guests who may be struggling on any given day can come in and 'grab a cookie' and receive a meal at no cost to them. The second program is just starting to catch on, we call it "service for food". This program allows members of the community to come in and offer time and labor to earn a meal and we partner with other organizations, like the Montour Falls library, so that when members of the community volunteer their time there, they can come see us for a meal that day.

We opened the doors to the Cafe in March of 2019 and the past few months have been a blur of work, passion, joy and gratitude.

What has helped you succeed and gain experience?

Mike and I are incredibly lucky to have a support system of good friends and family who have been beyond helpful. We are also incredibly grateful for the mentorship and support of Jeff and Val Snider, and are beyond grateful for the amazing woman who manages the cafe with Jen, Megan Zobel. Megan brings years of management experience and training in food preparation to the cafe and has been an invaluable asset. Additionally, the entire community here in Montour has been supportive of the mission of both the Cafe and the Center, the space, and the learning process of running a new business.

What inspires you?

I believe we truly inspire one another and are equally inspired by the constant wonder and amazement that our children find in life.

What keeps you up at night? What are your challenges?

The idea that there is more to do, that we could be doing more. The time we miss with our kids because of the work we are doing. The usual things that worry most business owners: money, insurance, hazards, money, finances, money etc.

What is your favorite local activity?

Jen just got a kayak, so that's on the list, hiking waterfalls and the FLX trails, and we really enjoy the local museums here in Schuyler and Steuben counties.

Is there anything else we should know about you?

We're partners in business and in life. Along with building and supporting community and fostering the idea of people helping people, environmental stewardship and sustainability is a top priority for us in business and in life.

Been There A Community Cafe

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