

Jennifer Vigran: A Hoosier Heroine

Being fortunate enough to have a nutritious meal and not having to wonder where my next meal will come from is something I fear I have always taken for granted. However, many people do have to worry about their next meal. Fortunately, Jennifer Vigran is helping Indianapolis face that challenge by serving as CEO of Second Helpings.

This "food rescue" organization collects food from stores and distributors, such as Kroger, Trader Joe's, US Foods, and Costco, that would otherwise be discarded, and then prepares nutritious meals from it to distribute to other organizations serving people in need. For example, each day Second Helpings prepares roughly 4,000 meals, and in December 2015, they rescued 250,786 pounds of food that was then prepared into 82,101 meals. In order to do so, Second Helpings also depended upon 3,637 volunteer hours.

Not only does Second Helpings provide nutritious meals to organizations serving the hungry, but they also train the less fortunate for positions in the food service industry. Since 1998, Second Helpings has graduated 622 people from the program. Among the graduates include a number of chefs serving area hotels and restaurants. Even DeWitt Jackson, Executive Chef for the Indianapolis Colts, is a graduate of their program.

Jennifer Vigran and her colleagues at Second Helpings are there to help people like DeWitt meet those goals. Vigran is a native of Cleveland, Ohio but has lived in Indiana since 1990. She went to Shaker Heights High School and then onto Wellesley College for her bachelor's degree and Ohio State University for her master's degree. Vigran started at Second Helpings as a volunteer in 2000, but has now been the CEO for five years. She loves knowing why her job is important and how it makes a difference. Her favorite part about her job is "the

energy generated by all of the volunteers and employees" at Second Helpings, as they strive to provide meals to those in need. At the same time, one of the hardest parts about her job "is being patient and knowing that you can't do everything."

Although she loves her work and many people depend upon her and her colleagues at Second Helpings for meals, that success has come with some cost to Vigran. When asked if she ever had any regrets about her job she mentioned that she had "missed some important events as her children grew older." She had stayed home with them for several years but then believed leading Second Helpings was what she was also called to do with her life. She loves her children but also believes deeply in the work she does. Unfortunately, as she noted, it just "comes with some costs."

When touring Second Helpings, Vigran was quick to point out that the meals they provide are designed to be healthy and nutritious. As a result, every meal has "a protein, a starch, and a vegetable." The facility at Second Helpings includes a large loading dock, freezers, refrigerators, and dry food storage. In the kitchen there are ovens and stoves, but surprisingly there is not a fryer in sight. In addition, nothing goes to waste at Second Helpings. For example, the bones from pork, beef, and chicken used that day were then placed into stock pots to be converted into soup base for the next day's meals.

Vigran always cares about the people whom she serves and never about herself. She always works hard, shows great determination, and never gives up no matter how many people are depending on her for their next meal. Second Helpings' motto is "Transforming Lives through the Power of Food," which is a very bold and true statement. Just showing a little kindness and taking time out of your day may transform someone's life. You never know the

path a person has walked and the places they have been. Second Helpings truly lives out their motto by transforming the lives of many each and every day through the power of nutritious meals.

Jennifer Vigran is helping to provide nutritious meals to individuals in need because she loves the people that she serves. She showed me that no matter who you are, you can always make a difference. That is why I can proudly say that Jennifer Vigran is my Hoosier Heroine.