

# Dawn Golik: Serving up warmth in cold of Summerset Village

By Dawn  
Golik

Preparing food for someone who's hungry is the universal way to show care and concern for another person. It crosses all cultures and translates into every language. It is timeless.

Summerset Village is the Fresno apartment complex that has been without heat and gas for more than two weeks. As November became December, and the weather gets colder, the several hundred residents who remain at this project, mostly Southeast Asian, can't cook hot meals or take warm showers.

They don't have any heat in their units and are facing several more weeks without these most basic amenities. Literally and figuratively, life is cold at Summerset Village right now.

But thanks to a partnership between the Red Cross, Fresno Interdenominational Refugee Ministries, the Southern Baptist Convention and other groups, twice a day, a small but mighty team of volunteers prepares a hot lunch and dinner for the 300 tenants who remain.

I spent three hours Wednesday afternoon helping prepare that evening's meal. The Southern Baptist Convention has established an impressively organized kitchen in Summerset Village's parking lot. Beneath an enormous white tent, steel racks hold huge stock pots, roasting pans and plastic bins.

The rundown living conditions inside Summerset Village are sharp contrast to the meticulously tended gardens that residents have planted outside. Vegetables, herbs, and other produce grow in patches next to front doors, and along walkways. These little micro farms are green, lush, and lovingly cared for.

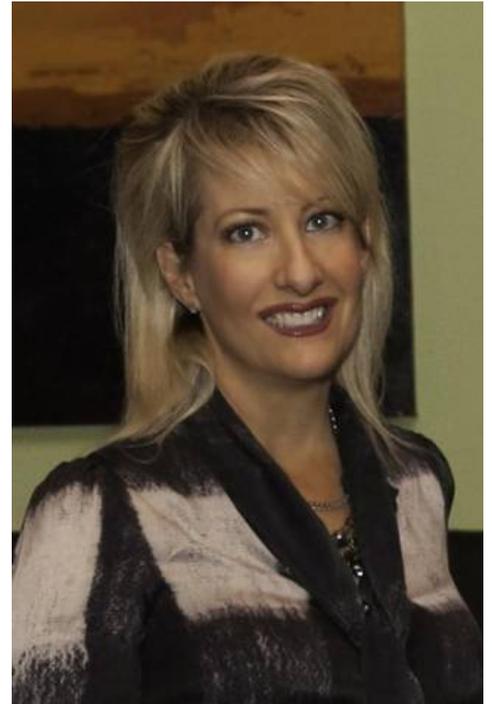
There are stacks of cutting boards and rolling tool carts full of knives, ladles and utensils. Rows of trailers are lined with shelves creaking under the weight of canned goods, cooking staples and supplies. There's even a field sink: a coffee dispenser filled with hot water set over a bucket, with soap and towels next to it.

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A towering banana tree impressed me. Shooting several yards above the roof of one apartment, someone had coaxed a tiny bunch of green bananas from it. Seeing the time, love and care that the tenants had put into these gardens, I better understand their reluctance to leave, even if to live somewhere better.

While the work of making dinner progressed, so did the business of making Summerset Village safe. I snapped green beans and watched a flurry of activity as repairs were made at the property. Workers in orange safety vests walked back and forth carrying equipment. Inspectors with paperwork and identification badges went in and out of rows of units.

Staff from social service agencies talked with tenants. At one point, a water main broke, and suddenly a small river



that quickly grew in length and width began making its way through the parking lot. Several people with walkie-talkies and clipboards conferred, then temporarily shut the water off.

Slowly, the smell of food began to drift through the apartments. Wednesday night's dinner was roasted beef brisket, fresh green beans and cauliflower, and white sticky rice. An Asian cook in a white uniform and chef's toque hat spoke to one of the volunteers in Hmong as together they dumped bags of hot chili flakes into a sterilized paint bucket, then added fish sauce and cilantro.

Volunteers spooned little piles of this brutally spicy paste into foil packets for the residents to add a familiar flavor to their meal. Huge briskets were seasoned and put into professional ovens. Pots of rice were divided into small portions and placed in heated warming trays.

Under the watchful eyes of an amazing team from the Southern Baptist Convention, a hot, delicious dinner for several hundred people began to appear.

As more volunteers showed up to help, we learned about another senseless mass shooting. Somewhere, the heated debate about who is to blame for the conditions at Summerset Village continued. Much of our community remains hardened to the plights and hardships of those who are in need. But none of that really mattered.

As the sun set Wednesday night in Fresno and the cold drifted back to those 300 tenants, there was still a dinner to make. And there were people who came to help. Standing shoulder to shoulder under that tent in our hairnets and aprons, cutting cauliflower or washing dishes, we were all lay ministers in the old, simple ritual of feeding hungry people.

Each of us was turning brisket, rice, and vegetables into a sacrament, and warming our own hearts and souls in the process.

Dawn Golik lives in Fresno with her husband and two young daughters. You can email her at [dawn.golik@gmail.com](mailto:dawn.golik@gmail.com). Those interested in helping the tenants at Summerset Village can visit Fresno Interdenominational Refugee Ministries' Facebook page to find out more.