

INSPIRATION



Rhona Bowles Kamar is the founder and executive director of Feed Louisville. AMANDA HANCOCK/COURIER JOURNAL

‘A gift from life, to me and to this community’

Woman fights food insecurity through Feed Louisville

Amanda Hancock
Louisville Courier Journal | USA TODAY NETWORK

For Rhona Bowles Kamar, there’s always been something about feeding people. • She felt the pull as a child on her grandparents’ farm in Metcalfe County, where Kamar grew up watching every move her grandmother – a woman who prepared three meals a day, every day – made in the kitchen. She felt a passion for how cuisine meets culture while co-owning Ramsi’s Cafe on the World, where Kamar developed recipes that remain on the Bardstown Road restaurant’s menu and where patrons thanked Kamar through tears of joy because she created a dish, whether vegetarian, dairy free or gluten free, that they were able to safely eat and enjoy.

Kamar felt this same tug, too, on a dark day that turned into dark weeks, and months, for Louisville’s food community.

In early 2020, Kamar was still processing the grief of a divorce and stepping away from Ramsi’s Cafe after more than 20 years with the restaurant that her ex-husband, Ramsi Kamar, started. Rhona Bowles Kamar, who studied journalism at the University of Kentucky, considered a return to writing. She also did some health coaching and taught cooking classes and thought about opening her own restaurant.

While Kamar figured out her next step, she rented a kitchen as a home base for a catering company.

That’s where, inside the Douglass Boulevard Christian Church, Kamar looked up to see Donny Greene, a local activist who works with Louisville’s



Chef Rhona Kamar prepares food to be loaded for delivery Jan. 14, 2021, as Feed Louisville prepares to deliver food and other items to those in need around Louisville. ALTON STRUPP/COURIER JOURNAL

houseless community, walking in on March 13, 2020, three days before Gov. Andy Beshear ordered the state’s bars and restaurant dining rooms to close in response to the coronavirus pandemic.

Kamar and Greene knew each other. Kamar had catered Greene’s wedding a few years before. But Kamar probably didn’t know that what Greene would say next would change the course of her life.

“He said, ‘With this pandemic thing, soup kitchens are shutting down. And people living on the streets are not gonna get food. They’re gonna get a sandwich if they’re lucky,’” Kamar recalled.

She felt the pull again. And she responded quickly to Greene with an offer to help.

“It was this moment and I’ll never forget it. It was a magical moment,” Kamar said. “I was like, ‘Well, how many meals do you need a day?’”

Six years later, she says if she’d thought longer about it, the moment may have passed.

“I usually like to plan everything out, and there was no plan,” Kamar, 58, said.

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Rhona Bowles Kamar

“I think if we’d sat down at any point to sketch out what this is today, we would have never done it. We would have found 100 reasons not to do it.”

Instead, Kamar called a few chef friends, including Claudia DeLatorre and Ruth Lestrage.

“I said, ‘Do you guys want to join me? Let’s cook for this guy for a couple of weeks,’” Kamar said. “And that is what we thought we would do.”

Within a few months, more than a dozen restaurants joined in to help cook hundreds of meals per week for the food insecure community. Their efforts didn’t have a name or a real end goal, but Kamar had the resolve to keep it going.

Their grassroots endeavor soon got official and Feed Louisville, with Kamar as the founder and executive director, was born. By late 2023, they moved into a 8,000-square-foot facility at 1334 Story Ave., where the mission to fight hunger and food waste, persists today. According to the nonprofit’s 2025 annual report, Feed Louisville produced 154,000 meals for unhoused and food-insecure people in Louisville and rescued 491,000 pounds of food from going to waste.

“We do this work because food is a basic human need. Period,” Kamar said. “Our chefs do this work because we can’t stand the thought that any person in this community would go one day without eating.”

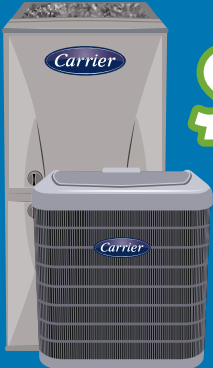
As Kamar continues to grow Feed Louisville, which now includes the social enterprise Zest Bowls, and as she walks around the kitchen and sees bundles of volunteers and sees food coming in and going out, she sometimes thinks back to a walk she took in 2018, where she spoke to the universe about what to do next.

“I don’t know what it is,” she remembers saying in the vein of a prayer. “But what I do know is, I want to work with a team of people. I want to use my love of food, and I want to do something that helps people.”

Feed Louisville checks those boxes. “Everything that I’ve done in my life led me to this place,” Kamar said. “Feed Louisville, to me, is a gift from life, to me and to this community.”

For information about volunteering or supporting Feed Louisville, visit feedlouisville.org.

Reach food and dining reporter Amanda Hancock at ahancock@courier-journal.com.

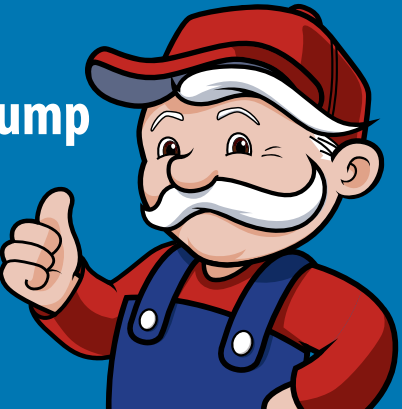


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