

Episode 39

A Culinary Instructor's Second Act Brings Fine Dining To A Soup Kitchen

Who	Audio Segment
Warren Schueler	<p>There's no reason in the world why people that are homeless, people down on their luck, people that are in their situation to come here, should not be able to experience a really...as good a meal as I can throw out and have that. And that's a big pleasure that I get out of it, that I can have a person, they'll say to me, "Wow. This is a meal that I know I would have paid \$25 for and it's here." And there's no reason why somebody that maybe never ate like this doesn't have the experience. And they get it on my Tuesdays.</p>
Song by Jackie Butler	<p style="text-align: center;">WOMAN LEADING SINGING IN LUNCHROOM <i>"Oh give thanks unto the Lord for he is good for he is good..."etc.</i></p>
Andy Levine	<p>Welcome to Second Act Stories, a podcast that looks at people who have made major life changes and are pursuing more rewarding lives in a second act. I'm your host, Andy Levine.</p> <p>Today, it's Tuesday and we're going to take you inside the St. Mark's Center for Community Renewal in Keansburg, New Jersey. It's connected to the Episcopal Church right next door.</p> <p>This might sound like a revival meeting but it's not. We're in a soup kitchen that is about to serve lunch to 75 hungry individuals. That name, soup kitchen, is old and dated and not politically correct but that's what everyone here calls it. And every day they serve breakfast and lunch to homeless men and women...to people who are down on their luck...to people who are on a fixed income and barely scraping by.</p> <p>After Jackie Butler is done singing, Deacon Rose Broderick who leads St. Marks Episcopal Church says a prayer.</p>
Prayer by Deacon Rose	<p style="text-align: center;">Insert Prayer</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>So let us pray, the lord be with you And also with you... Heavenly father, we thank you for this day and the many blessings of this life, we thank you for all that we have and all that we are, let us remember to be kind to one another, and remember as we enter this time of forgiveness, that we should always repent and always look at how we can become better,</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>In your precious name we pray, Amen Amen</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Continue background noise</p>

Andy	And then Warren Schueler, a man who will turn seventy-four later this month and has been in the kitchen all morning, comes out and announces, the meal of the day.
Meal Intro by Warren Schueler	<p style="text-align: center;">Insert Meal Announcement</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>And today, we're going to have a traditional French meal. And it gives me a great honor to do this for you. It was one of the very first meals that I was taught when I attended the French Culinary Institute. And it's called Coq Au Vin.</i></p>
Andy	<p>Yes, today's lunch is Coq Au Vin with sour cream, sage mashed potatoes as well as a green salad to start off the meal. And I feel fairly certain this is the only soup kitchen in America, maybe in the world, that is serving coq au vin today.</p> <p>Warren's day started at 8:00 am when he went to Shoprite to buy bay leaves for today's meal. They didn't have any at the soup kitchen. Then at 9:00 am, he meets his two assistants Pam and Gary at the soup kitchen and they start preparing today's meal.</p>
Video of Warren and Team in Kitchen (0.00-end)	<p style="text-align: center;">Insert Background Discussions in the Kitchen</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Gary: Put a little more ground in?</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Warren: Yeah, Yeah, let's me get you some tomato because that's the next to go...</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Continue background noise in Kitchen</p>
Andy	<p>Warren, Pam and Gary have been working together every Tuesday for the past three years. And they always do their best to prepare a gourmet meal for the men and women who come here on Tuesday. So that's the backdrop of today's story.</p> <p>Let's learn a little more about Warren Schuler and his second act at St. Marks. As you'll hear it's actually his third act.</p>
Warren	I started as a chemistry teacher. I have a masters in chem, bachelors in chem and masters. And I started teaching chem and in 1975, the New York City finances went belly up. And they laid off 22,000 teachers. And my field of chemistry was critical employment. So I was okay but they laid off the home economics teacher. And they sent the notice around could you do anything else besides whatever you were teaching. So I had put myself through college baking at night in the student cafeteria and in a bakery up in the Bronx. So I wrote that down and they said, "Okay, we're gonna make a course called baking and you're gonna be the instructor.

Andy	<p>So Warren was now teaching chemistry and baking. And he did that at a high school in Staten Island for another 14 years.</p> <p>But then in 1989, Warren met a well-to-do man named Richard Grossman. He was creating a program called C-CAP which is short for Careers through Culinary Arts Program. And he needed good culinary instructors. He took a liking to Warren and he offered to pay for him to learn some serious cooking.</p>
Warren	<p>So he sent me on a scholarship to the French Culinary Institute in lower Manhattan, every Saturday and Sunday for 2 years.</p> <p>Eight hours a day, all year long. I graduated from that program then I went for French pastries, graduated from that program. And by then, the program in school was no more baking. It was now culinary. And I was teaching more culinary than chemistry.</p>
Andy	<p>And it opened up a whole new world for Warren.</p>
Warren	<p>So then, all of a sudden I get transferred from science department into career in tech. And my chairman in science said, "I'm giving up a great chemistry teacher, an AP chemistry teacher, to go and make donuts." And I went from French Culinary to the CIA in Hyde Park for experimental cooking to Johnson & Wales for seafood cooking, New York Restaurant School for back to basics. One of my students won a scholarship to go to London to Le Cordon Bleu and one of the perks was to take her culinary teacher, me. So I went over there and had a week with her in Le Cordon Bleu in London. And then I came back went to the Culinary Institute Again in Hyde Park for Latin American cuisine. And I guess that was the end of it. And then I just finished my whole career teaching culinary.</p>
Andy	<p>He left the New York City school system at the age of 57. But he continued to work with Mr. Grossman and Careers through Culinary Arts Program until he turned 63.</p> <p>In 2012, Warren was pretty well retired. But he found his way to St. Mark's Center for Community Renewal and the soup kitchen.</p>
Warren	<p>When Superstorm Sandy happened, one of the fellows in my church made an announcement that if you have any food that you wanna donate, that they're being overwhelmed here at the community center and...</p>
Andy	<p>Because this community had been overwhelmed by the storm.</p>
Warren	<p>Overwhelmed, yeah. If you were to drive down the street, you can still see houses that are elevated, half elevated, you know? Houses that are boarded up. So I brought over...I started emptying my freezer because I didn't have any electricity. So we cooked at home because we had gas, brought it here. And the fellow that I knew, I said to him, "Do you need help when the electricity comes on?" He said, "Yeah, you know, I could use somebody."</p>

	So that's when I joined the Monday group cooking. And the Monday led to Tuesday because Tuesday, nobody was cooking. And they asked me, "Would you pick up Tuesday?" And that's when I approached Pam and Gary and I said, "I'm gonna pick up a day. Would you come in and work with me?"
Andy	We've observed you today. But just for our listeners, sort of walk us through what a day is like here when you arrive, what happens, and just kind of the order of march.
Warren	Well, I usually check what's available ahead of time. I come in on a Sunday and I go through the freezer and decide what I'm gonna make and look if we have any fresh vegetables like potatoes, carrots, onions. And then I set my menu from that. I've come in where I've set my menu and the director will say to me, "We got to get rid of pork chops. So scrap what you were gonna do..."
Andy	We're pushing the pork chops today.
Warren	Right. "Can you think to do something with pork chops." So the whole menu can change. But normally, it's set and I get in around 9.30. Gary and Pam are here and we start working, prepping for what we're gonna do. And it's always a lot of prep work because of we try to not open a can for vegetables. We really like to work with fresh stuff.
Andy	So give us some insight into the population that you serve here at St Mark's.
Warren	There are people that are just down on their luck. And they'll be here two or three months and then we won't see them. Something changes, either they'll get housing somewhere else besides here, maybe they'll get a job, maybe they move on. There are people that are here and they're living here. They will probably be here till they die and they're down on their luck. And this place is a sanctuary for them because we serve lunch every day. Unless it's such inclement weather, we never close so they have a place. We have people that are living down on a bike trail in tents because they can't get housing.
Andy	And it's 24 degrees outside today.
Warren	Twenty four degrees. They're here. They'll be here at 9 o'clock in the morning obviously, to get a warm cup of coffee and to warm up. And they'll be here till the end till 1 o'clock and 1:30. And then they'll go back to the tent.
Andy	We got to speak to Billy Graham, a man who is a regular at the soup kitchen. He's a master painter by trade. But in 2007 the brakes on his truck failed and the vehicle literally ran over him. And he hasn't been able to work since that day.

Billy Graham	I was checking my oil and it started rolling on Ravine Drive, and it was going into the backyard, the big gorge. It was a horrible story, but I've managed to survive it. It rolled over me and I had to just lay in bed and heal for 3 months. And I had a tough time back then.
Andy	What does this place mean to you?
Billy	A lot of things. It's a lot of love here. There's a lot of good friends here and people are kind. Kindness is a big thing, you know, and love, you know. Together, people together without all the hype in the world today.
Andy	I know chef Warren Schueler is gonna be making a meal for you later on today.
Billy	Yeah. He's a wonderful man. Warren's a great guy. He's a great chef and he's always happy and, you know, nice to everyone.
Andy	Let's go back to Warren So what has this work taught you about the homeless population, the poor population here in New Jersey?
Warren	The average person in Monmouth County, Ocean County, maybe the whole state of New Jersey has no concept of what put some of these people here and how we should be helping them. I'm not saying we stand at the door and give them money but you have a crisis where there's not one homeless shelter in all Monmouth County. Not one. There's not any here.
Andy	What would you say is the most gratifying aspect of your work here at St. Marks?
Warren	I would have to say hearing the people just be appreciative.
Andy	And I heard that as I walked around the room and asked people about their Coq Au Vin.
Meal interviews	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Could I ask you how the meal was?</i> <i>The meal was excellent. It's always good here.</i> <i>I wouldn't miss a meal out of here. I think this is five stars.</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>I'm asking people what they think of the Coq au vin. What do you guys think at this table?</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>It is delicious. The best cook ever.</i> <i>Delicious.</i> <i>I think it's awesome. And we're always grateful here.</i> <i>Oh I love his cooking. Warren he goes all out.</i></p>
Andy	I can't tell you how many people we walked around interviewing that said this is just a fabulous meal.

Warren	Yeah, it's very heartwarming. I get a thousand times more than I give.
Andy	So you served Coq Au Vin today, which was delicious. You know, it's kind of unusual for folks in a soup kitchen to be serving really high end, delicious international food, that kind of thing. Why do you go the extra mile in this?
Warren	There's no reason in the world why people that are homeless, people down on their luck, people that are in their situation to come here, should not be able to experience a really...as good a meal as I can throw out and have that. And that's a big pleasure that I get out of it, that I can have a person, they'll say to me, "Wow. This is a meal that I know I would have paid \$25 for and it's here." And there's no reason why somebody that maybe never ate like this doesn't have the experience. And they get it on my Tuesdays.
Andy	We've established that you're almost 74. How many years do you hope to be doing this for?
Warren	Forever.
Andy	So every Tuesday you'll find Warren, Pam and Gary here at the soup kitchen. Every week they are doing their best to put together a first class for a group of people that most everyone else in New Jersey wants to ignore.
	OUTGOING MUSIC; FADE TO BACK DROP FOR PODCAST CONCLUSION

Andy	<p>Normally at the end of each episode I make a few observations and comments about the story and its lessons. But I'm going to pass on that today and share with you a different message.</p> <p>It's about the soup kitchen itself. Earlier this year, the volunteers at St. Marks Center for Community Renewal decided that it really was time to upgrade the kitchen. They need to blow out one of the walls and make it larger. And they need to buy new equipment that will allow them to serve more meals but also teach people how to cook on their own. They have drawn-up the plans and estimated the costs of the construction project at \$50,000.</p> <p>So here's the ask...If you can find it in your heart to help this incredible organization, it would be terrific. You can support the project by sending Deacon Rose and St. Marks Center for Community Renewal a check. I've put the address in the show notes at the end. No gift is too small - every bit helps.</p> <p>Finally, if you enjoyed listening to today's story, we have a special treat for you. My friend Paul Kaplan, an award-winning film producer, came with me to St. Marks and created a short video of today's story. So you can actually meet - Warren, Pam, Gary, Deacon Rose, Billy and all of the wonderful people at St. Mark's Center for Community Renewal. Just go to the show notes and click on the link provided at the top of the page.</p> <p>Our very special thanks to the entire crew at St. Mark's. It was an honor to share their story with all of you.</p> <p>We hope you'll keep listening. There are more second act stories just around the corner.</p>
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