

Amaryllis



Winter, 2022

Amaryllis, a newsletter for the Penn South community, was conceived, and has been researched and written by Jane Hogg since 1996.

Serving More Than Soup Kindness, caring... lots of things

The Church of the Holy Apostles has a long history. In the late 1800s, the 9th Avenue train rumbled close by, and the small parish was rather impoverished. The Episcopal Diocese considered it best to sell the church and encouraged parishioners to attend St. Peters Episcopal on 20th Street.

Rand Frew, the newly appointed Minister, living blocks away in Penn South, thought if closing was inevitable, they should do something dramatic to call attention to the hungry and homeless gathered on the benches in front of the city medical center across the street.

Helped by a handful of volunteers, on October 22, 1982, they served thirty-five meals in a small area on the main floor of *Mission House* and continued doing it for the rest of the week.

Fast forward to 2022. Today the *Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen* is a well-known phenomenon in our city.

First, I talked with **Chris Molinari**, the Chef/Manager. He explained, "I grew up in the business. My grandfather had a diner down on 14th Street in the meatpacking area. We kids worked after school and weekends doing whatever needed to be done."

I wondered how he came to get this job.

"There was an ad for it in the *New York*





Times. I sent in my resume, was called for an interview, they liked what they saw, and hired me.”

Lunches are now standard and served five days each week. Planning a menu means knowing what items are available. Standard suppliers are federal, government, and city agencies, plus occasional surprises. He also knows exactly what uncooked basics remain boxed in cooled, confined spaces in the basement.

Before the week begins, Chris knows what they’ll serve each day. His office, positioned directly across from the cooking area, means he can see both cooks at work—the same two who’ve been doing it for thirteen years. The pair arrive early, turn on the stoves, and begin work at 6:00 AM. Chris fills in himself if a problem arises.

As for the history of the kitchen, I met with **Nichole Guerra**, who handles publicity, outreach, and fundraising. New to the area, she came from Hartford when her husband got a job here in the city. In Connecticut, she was working for a non-profit to create supportive housing. She began to search for job possibilities in this area.

A headhunter matched her up with *Holy Apostles*, and she began in July 2019. Talking with guests, she remembers specifics. One said, “Eating here is my escape from homelessness.” Another said, “When I’m here, I feel like a human again.”

Volunteer coordinator and outreach manager **Steve Fanto** begins his day greeting new volunteers (between fifteen and thirty each day) and providing a well-rehearsed orientation. When finished, they’re ready to get to work. He’s been on the job for three years and has been connected to the kitchen closer to twenty.

Three days each week, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, the Church provides pantry bags. Included are canned items, a gallon of milk, boxed drinks, and a variety of fruits and vegetables.

Manager of Social Services is bi-lingual **Jay Alfaro**. Although fairly new to the Church, she comes with ten years of professional experience doing the exact same thing elsewhere. Her volunteer crew, meeting with individual guests, provide a wide range of solutions; medical services, a food pantry, nearby overnight shelter, transportation, clothing, and opticians are a few.



HOLY APOSTLES
Soup Kitchen



Beginning in January, the Church offered a nighttime warming center. Contracted by the city with funds from the Department of Homeless Services, they can operate for 100 days. Not to exceed thirty people, those seeking warmth may enter at 9:00 PM and leave by 7:00 AM. Departing guests are given a breakfast sandwich and a bagged lunch.

Both the Soup Kitchen area and the warming center remain safe. Security is handled by a licensed outside agency. Enjoying their surroundings, *Holy Apostles* has had no turnover of personnel.

The Chief Operating Officer is **Michael Ottley**. By 8:00 each morning, he knows exactly who is present, what they're doing, and where they're doing it. High up on his office wall, a camera shows dozens of frames so he can zoom in immediately if a question arises.

What brought him to the Church? "An ad in the *Times*. I was hired in 2008."

Most of the daily soup kitchen work is done by volunteers. But what does the Church do to get all that necessary money? Extensive work: here are some of their numerous efforts:

- After hours, they rent the space for numerous productions, including musical, theatrical, and performance pieces—not just neighborhood groups but from groups anywhere in the city.
- Catering companies rent their kitchen space, many on a regular basis and others just occasionally.
- Often, space is sought for family events, celebrations, reunions, weddings, and even funerals.
- Gala events, too—these are usually fundraisers for other non-profit organizations.

Numerous efforts would be an understatement.

And here's one I never mentioned: The parishioner who delights in maintaining the Church gardens figured out that they can keep bees on the roof. In fact, they now have two functioning hives.

Result? Six-ounce bottles of 2 *Queen Bees Honey* clearly marked "Chelsea Local." Below is the name of the Church and its address. At \$20 each, a cash crop. 🐝





Restaurant Roaming

If you're coming from the post office on 9th and head east, there's the *CalleDao* with Cuban Chinese cuisine.

But if *CVS* on 10th Avenue is where you'd be (and you're legally old enough to drink), to the right is a small bar requiring proof of being fully vaccinated plus a signed picture ID. Directly across the street is a full block of restaurants. Starting with *Best Burger*, then *Don Giovanni Ristorante's* brick oven pizza, and lots more, ending with *Empire Diner* offering plenty of everything.

Watching something at the *Hudson Guild Theater* on 26th Street? Turn right on 9th.

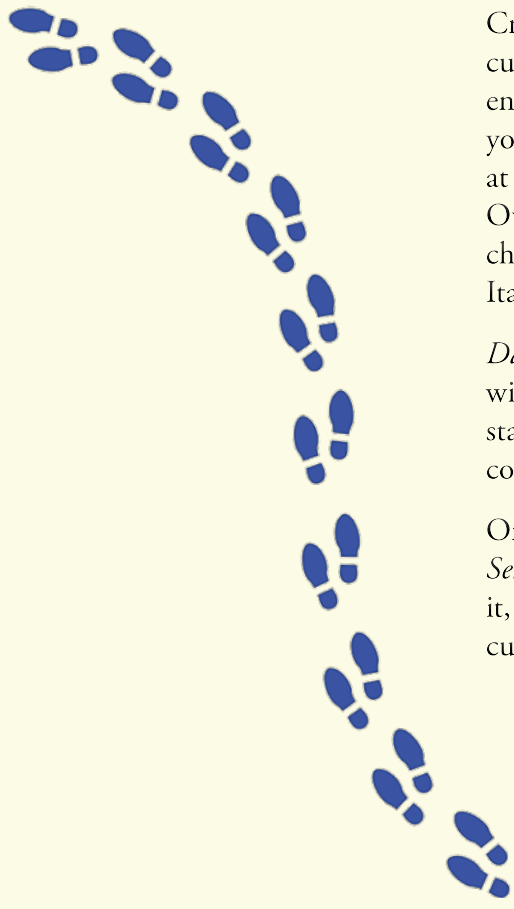
On the west side, just below 26th, there's *Jun-Men Ramen Bar*, tiny and intimate inside but a larger roofed heated area outside. Not familiar with Japanese cuisine? Go to their website: junmenramen.com, and you'll not only see their menu but be able to take a Technicolor tour of what's on the menu.

Walk a few feet more, and you're at *Citizens* rounding the corner, which includes the heated outside enclosure. Continuing south, *Chelsea House*, heavy on seafood, is mid-way down the block, with *Grand Sichuan* finishing the street.

Cross 9th Avenue, and *Shukette* offers Middle Eastern and Mediterranean cuisine. Finally, at 23rd is *Chelsea Square Diner*. They open at 6:30 AM, early enough for a leisurely breakfast, and well-positioned with corner windows if you're keeping an eye out for the Crosstown Select bus. Most days, they close at 3:00 AM, but Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, it's open round the clock. Owned by the Mavromichalis family since it opened in 1981, the varied food choices cover all bases. Known for large portions and numerous Greek and Italian specialties, the varied menu shows they're keeping up with the times.

Dallas BBQ is on 8th. Keep heading east and on the next block is *Bonchon*, with Korean-style food. The menu itself provides a range of specific statistics, including calories, and indicates high sodium (relevant for the diet conscious).

On the south side of 23rd, close to the Gotham Comedy Club, is *Sushi/Seki* with roofed over curbside dining and controlled heating. Next to it, *Jake's Saloon* has inside seating allowing a maximum of forty-nine customers at any given time. ☺





Walking About

Wandering west on 26th Street is a shop that mystifies me. *Blue Sky*, a jewelry shop, is clearly marked:

NO RETAIL STRICTLY WHOLESALE

To make purchases, you'll need to provide your Sales Tax ID and Business License. No photos or videos are allowed. I passed it heading to *KDM Hardware* after turning the corner coming from *Whole Foods*. Besides all the materials needed to stock a store, you'll find a person there (a home sewer's delight) who sharpens not only knives but also scissors. I called 212-242-3799 to be sure he was still available. The person who answered the phone said he wasn't, but hope springs eternal.

Fresh food for seniors! Never done it before? Easy. Three neighborhood senior centers are involved in the program. Select the one most convenient for you: *Sage Senior Center* at 305 7th Avenue; *Hudson Guild Eliot Center* at 441 West 26th Street; *Visions at Selis Manor* at 135 West 23rd. For \$9, cash only, you'll receive a large bag of mixed seasonal fruits and vegetables. Hopefully, more Chelsea kitchens will have fresh new scents swirling about this winter.

More Walking...

Continuing east on 23rd, noticed a sign in the barbershop window.

Hairstylist spot. Chair for rent.

Remember years ago, when times were getting rough, and clothing prices rocketed? Economists predicted those days meant people would hang on to one possibility—spending money on themselves. Hair and fingernails were hits.

Wondering why I no longer saw long lines at *Urgent Care* with people waiting for COVID-19 testing, the next block solved the mystery. A vacant storefront sprouted a well-canopied new business, *Sameday Health*. Walk-ins are welcome. Numerous options include COVID-19 testing, home testing, and IV drip therapy.

Walking north on 7th Avenue, the entire *FIT* building had wonderful wall art wrapping its windowless walls. Seemed likely an upper-class student assignment showing the city how “lovely” looks. ☺





Price Patrol

Depending on who's reporting, tomorrow is sure to cost more than yesterday—big-ticket items... refrigerators, cars, washing machines.

I tend to notice what's in my world. *Dollar Pizza's* awning says \$1.00, but the cashier rings up \$1.50. Both bags of my sixteen-ounce *Trader Joe's* Medium and Dark roast coffee just jumped from \$3.99 to \$4.69, and then again to \$4.99. I don't call that sliding up—jumping is more accurate.

Today at *Ideal*, the usual \$1.29 quart of whole milk costs \$1.49 at the register. Jasmine Rice costs \$1.96 a pound (if it's five pounds) or \$1.60 a pound if it's ten. At *Trader Joe's*, a three-pound bag is \$3.49.

Oh... how about this! *Dollar Pizza* is still a dollar at the original place, 25th Street corner at 6th Avenue. Crisp and crunchy bottom remains the same.

The Nut House

Scrunched up just south of *Best Buy* on 6th Avenue, the new awning stretching far over the sidewalk makes *The Nut House* more noticeable when you're walking up the block.

They carry nuts, every kind you know about and some you've never seen.

Next, they do all sorts of things to them; bake them, toast them, salt them, dip them in chocolate, add spices, whip them into butter—and that's just the nuts.

The rear of the shop is much wider. Wander in there, and you find candy, syrups, even Sriracha sauce (which I see at *Trader Joe's*). *The Nut House* and *Trader Joe's* are close enough to make comparison pricing convenient. ☺




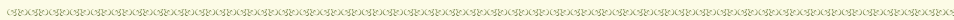


Don't Do It

Suddenly, every time you look at your inbox to check your email, someone is asking you to donate. The local library asks (even before you log in) along with loads of common causes, favorite radio stations, trusted friends, and people you usually like.

Hit the delete button—it's become my immediate reaction. Avoid being guilt-tripped or cleverly bludgeoned into increasing the donations already given. I suspect my sentiment is spreading.

It's no different when you go to the lobby and open your mailbox. Much of that Happy Holiday mail suggests you can make it even happier buying something from the sender. 



Paper Perfected

When we started to talk, I said I'd known how to fold paper since I was five; each paper napkin was folded in half and put next to the dinner plate. My job was to set the table.

The person I was talking to laughed. "Nowadays, most people use its more formal name, a Japanese word, 'origami.'" And so, my interview with Chelsea-ite Gay Merrill Gross began.

In the early 1960s, her neighborhood library only had three origami books. But the larger branch on 53rd Street had several more—one she'd never seen before written by Lillian Oppenheimer and Shari Lewis. On its book jacket, there were bios for both authors. Lillian's mentioned she had twenty-seven grandchildren.

"I remember thinking to myself... Wow, could you imagine having a grandmother who did origami? It would be like having a grandfather who owned Disneyland!"

Here our conversation fast-forwarded twenty years. "In the early 1980s, I finally got up the courage to go to an origami meeting, and that led me to help out with Lillian's library. Each week I went up there after work with two friends,





and we'd spend time doing whatever she wanted done. Someone even gave us a name... the *Lillian Oppenheimer Volunteer Enthusiasts, LOVE Group* for short.

"A few years later, Lillian started inviting me to her family parties. That's when I realized my childhood wish had come true. Lillian was like a second grandmother to me!

"As a child, I was very much aware that my father was creative; he could draw, paint and sculpt. I couldn't do any of those things. During World War II, he served in the Army Corps of Engineers building airfields for planes to land on in the Pacific. My mother didn't get letters from him during this time, but almost every day, she received a cartoon depicting the life of an American soldier in the Pacific.

"Another thing he did was tell stories, and while he did it, he drew pictures on large paper. I wondered how my father could be so creative and artistically talented since I hadn't inherited any of those talents.

"When I was nine years old, I started folding after teaching myself how to do it by reading a not so very good book. I had finally discovered an artistic activity that I was good at. I learned I could create things by following instructions on how to fold paper.

"My mother, neither creative nor artistic, could sew well and also knit and crochet. What she created had practical uses. Years later, I realized I could create things from origami that were also practical: boxes, jewelry, ornaments, greeting cards, handmade gifts.

"Origami, for me, served as a springboard for creativity. If you were to give me a lump of clay or a blank canvas, I wouldn't know what to do, but give me an origami model and some paper, and I'm all set to go. I can think of something creative with it.

"I've written eleven books. Go to any library and ask the librarian to search for them. If not at that branch, they can broaden the search to all branches, even inter-library loans.

"One of the ways I am inventive with origami is by creating stories to go along with the folding process. So, far from being a solitary pursuit, as a member of *OrigamiUSA*, I'm surrounded by people who share my interests, and I enjoy making new friends.






“When I write a book, it has to take the reader to a fun place. Good instructions and appealing models are absolute necessities.

“Book buyers might go to Amazon. They have eight of my books on origami and three on napkin folding. Prefer to view? Go to *YouTube* and select ‘Origami Studio NYC.’”

With that, Gay looked at her watch, explained she didn’t want to be late for their monthly origami meeting, and headed west to take a C train to the *American Museum of Natural History*. The Museum is the national headquarters of OrigamiUSA and home of the annual Holiday Origami Tree.

How’s that for a happening? A great interview had made my day complete! 



Payment Provided

Back and forth over the internet... like near neighbors talking. Guess it’s for real. Ours is a community. First, someone recovering from a broken wrist needed someone in her building to help relocate a bookcase.

Then another someone, same building, needed someone to accompany her to a morning medical appointment. Broken wrist responded immediately.

“I’ll do that. No problem.”

”Paying it back?” No. “Paying it forward.” Simple gestures that seal the cement our community. 