

Off Their Plate provides meals to health care workers on the coronavirus front lines

By [Devra First](#) Globe Staff, Updated March 27, 2020, 12:00 p.m.

With restaurants closed for dine-in business, the industry is suffering, and many people have lost their jobs. At the same time, workers on the front lines of the coronavirus don't have time to prepare nutritious meals to help keep them going. A new organization, [Off Their Plate](#), is working to address both problems.

It began when Natalie Guo, a medical student at Harvard who previously worked in business, reached out to local chefs Ken Oringer (Little Donkey, Toro, and more) and Tracy Chang (Pagu). The idea: Raise money to provide meals to health care workers, and pay cooks now out of work to make them.

“In 10 days, we raised something like \$80,000,” Guo says, and the effort has expanded to New York, Pittsburgh, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. By Thursday, its fifth day of operation in Boston, Off Their Plate had served close to 1,000 meals in the area — to Massachusetts General Hospital, Brigham and Women's, Faulkner, Boston Medical Center, and Beth Israel Deaconess, with more coming soon, including Carney Hospital, Boston Health Care for the Homeless, and other federally qualified health centers. Meals go to everyone from nurses to hazmat teams to the people working the front desk. “It's a massive effort here,” Guo says. “It's not just MDs. Very soon this is going to consume the entire health force.”

One hundred percent of donations go to wages and meal costs. According to a ticker on the website, Off Their Plate has so far raised enough to cover 6,500 meals, more than 2,000 work hours, and \$32,500 in wages. A \$100 donation covers the cost of providing 10 meals.

“It’s been really fortuitous to be able to get a lot of the people who are not able to collect unemployment or people we decided to reach out to ... and be able to help them earn some money,” Oringer says. “A lot of them have been with us for more than 10 years. We are trying to take care of our family and our community. We’re getting food from purveyors, from fishermen, who are getting really, really hurt by all of this.”

In addition to making healthy meals that taste good, the chefs are focused on ensuring safe operations. Thus far, Chang says, they have prepared fried rice and paella. “We want to emphasize that these meals are nutritious and delicious, and that we’re taking into account allergens as well, so we are keeping shellfish and nuts out of these. The past two dishes we did happened to be gluten-free because they were rice-based.” They are creating recipes and safety protocols that can be passed along to partner chefs in other cities, so they too can join the effort. “We want to make sure we are taking the utmost precaution in the health and safety of our own employees and the people they are feeding. The last thing we want to do is be part of the problem,” Chang says.

The health care community is grateful. A note from a Brigham staffer posted on Off Their Plate’s [Instagram](#) reads: “As one of the folks in the ER and one of their Hazmat folks, I was ready to sit down and have my lousy frozen dinner ... it was all I could get my hands on ...

when your wonderful warm meal arrived. Can't say thanks enough for the love and full belly!"

To make a donation to Off Their Plate or learn more, go to www.offtheirplate.org.

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