



# SPOTLIGHT ON GATHER55

Hands On Hartford has been serving the local Hartford, Connecticut community since 1969, implementing meal programs, providing housing assistance, and conducting outreach to homeless communities throughout the city and the greater area. In 2022, the organization realized the opportunity to further provide Hartford with affordable meals through a unique concept: a restaurant where you pay what you can, named Gather55.

Gather55 was born out of the COVID-19 pandemic, when Hands On Hartford was forced to close its soup kitchen and its neighborhood café, The Café at Fifty-Five, which helped fund the nonprofit. Rather than rebuild both post-pandemic, Hands On Hartford set out to build a new concept, one that would serve everyone in the community.



In a fine dining experience, Gather55 provides customers with the opportunity to pay what they can and cover the cost of other's meals, pay a minimum of \$3, or volunteer their time to cover the cost of their meal. Gather55's aim is to undo the stigma associated with charity and provide a dignified dining experience for everyone. Unlike in a traditional soup kitchen, where individuals receive standard rations, all guests are treated to a traditional restaurant experience, including being seated by waitstaff and ordering off a standard menu.

Gather55's work doesn't stop at feeding the community. The restaurant also practices waste reduction efforts, including utilizing root-to-stock techniques to reduce food scraps and make healthy and delicious stocks and soups. Surplus food is repurposed into new meals, and the restaurant practices just-in-time cooking by preparing meals in small batches to prevent overproduction. The restaurant also boasts a beautiful vegetable and herb garden (pictured left), which produces crops used in its meals.

CET has provided recommendations to help staff and volunteers sort properly and reduce contamination by grouping bins and using CET's customize waste bin signage. CET also provided information on how to train employees and volunteers to ensure that they know where all waste must go and to help them learn new waste practices.

Starting in October of 2022, Gather55 began partnering with guest chefs from around Connecticut to host monthly fine dining dinners, where 20% of the evening reservations are set aside for individuals using non-paying community vouchers. Through these efforts, Gather55 has demonstrated the important intersection of feeding communities and preventing wasted food.

## Gather55's Impact



**17,500** no-cost meals  
provided to the community



**> 89,000 lbs** of wasted food composted  
by Hands On Hartford and Gather55



**> 18,700 pounds of  
CO<sup>2</sup>** diverted