

# 5 DRINKS WITH MICHELLE MEISSEN

MUSICIANS IN  
BATHROOMS  
FEATURING  
PRETTY DARN  
(AND SOME  
PRETTY DARN  
CUTE CO-STARS)



CELEBRATE | HILTON HEAD!



HOLIDAY  
GIFT  
IDEAS  
FOR HER

PLUS

A GUIDE TO  
GIVING  
CHARITABLY  
IN SOMEONE  
ELSE'S NAME

HAPPY HOLIDAYS, LOWCOUNTRY!

YEAR-END  
FINANCIAL TIPS  
FOR 2019

DECEMBER 2019



➤  
Nina Greenplate  
gives us a tour  
of Sandalwood  
Community Food  
Pantry.



Dr. Nannette Pierson, founder

ARTICLE BY NINA GREENPLATE PHOTOGRAPHY BY M.KAT

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# SANDALWOOD

## COMMUNITY FOOD PANTRY

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'TIS THE GIVING SEASON EVERY DAY

**F**ood takes center stage at most celebrations, and the holidays are no exception. Kitchens gather guests like kids to the dessert table. But no matter where you slice that gifted fruitcake, eating is often the best part.

Seasons change, and each one steps forward to greet the next. Festive yummys turn into routine fare, and most of us will have plenty of choices to sustain us. Yet 50.1 percent of our Lowcountry neighbors live below poverty level, with nutrition basics left

uncertain and unsatisfied. They are the homeless and disabled, the working poor, and those with high-risk incomes. Sandalwood Community Food Pantry has been faithfully serving these often-invisible neighbors for more than 10 years. It was the brainchild of Rev. Dr. Nannette Pierson, born from her personal witness of hunger on the island and her fire to do something about it.

"We are all family here," Pierson said of her free-choice pantry, located at Queen's Chapel AME on



# SANDALWOOD

## COMMUNITY FOOD PANTRY

Beach City Road. "Our doors are open to anyone in need. Our clients are treated with dignity, compassion and privacy."

Sandalwood is a non-profit, non-denominational initiative, offering food, clothing, and basic toiletry needs. It is volunteer-driven and purposefully committed to the 850-plus local families the organization serves. Drop in any Tuesday or Friday to join a large circle of friends for prayer, and perhaps a story or two, before being welcomed in.

"Every day, not just special times of year, we stand and give in the spirit of what it means to be a church," Pierson said. That giving is made possible through a variety of sources. Grocery items are collected from Second Helpings (a regional food rescue and distribution source), houses of worship, local businesses, and organizations. New and longtime friends stop in to make a variety of donations such as nonperishable goods, grooming items, small toys, school supplies, and clothing. Gifts are always welcome and genuinely appreciated. Sandalwood is also one of 300 agencies partnered with the Lowcountry Food Bank of South Carolina to receive USDA products. Grants are integral to Sandalwood's financial operation, with 95 percent of all income returned back to the pantry and its clients.

The spirit of giving is indeed alive each week, but December holds a telling generosity. It is evident that island and Lowcountry area residents join in the holiday cheerfulness right along with Sandalwood, giving like a twinkle-eyed St. Nick with an extra set of elves. Tom Faranda, Sandalwood's board president and volunteer, talks of how the gifting speaks volumes about the character of the community. "They really come through for us," he said. "This area is known for how caring they are for those hungry and in need. We reach out during this season to ensure our clients are comfortable during the holidays, and we are always very grateful."

Many thoughtful people and organizations come forward: an island physician's office wraps 50-plus children's Christmas presents; an electronics store donates multiple trays of whole turkeys with all the tasty trimmings; a local church gives warm gloves, hats, mittens and other new clothing items faithfully each year; students at an island middle school, in cooperation with Fellowship of Christian Athletes, hand-make over 30 fleece blankets in varieties of themes and colors; a favorite island grocer packs 60 bags of nonperishable holiday meal essentials; a local jeweler packs a virtual sleigh full of stuffed puppies and teddy bears for the little ones.

"We are always so blessed this time of year," Pierson said. "I am never surprised at the overflow of this community's generosity. They go above and beyond." Clients look forward to providing their families these special meals and presents that they normally could not afford.

"We are church wherever we stand," Pierson said. "A giving heart must continue beyond the walls of worship and transition into a ministry where hungry souls can come and dine."

Spiritually, Pierson has taken her own personal journey into the ministry. She earned a Master's of



Piggly Wiggly and Carolina Seafood and Produce, are part of Sandalwood's Totes of Love program.



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Divinity from Princeton Theological Seminary and, five years later, received her ministry doctorate from Drew University Theological School. It was this past September 27, her birthday, when Pierson was ordained an itinerant elder in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Asked how these accomplishments support her work at Sandalwood, she proudly responded, "I now have the opportunity to reach farther. Our people at the pantry just want to speak, to be believed, and listened to. It's being part of a tribe, one that's grown to feel safe." This culture of fellowship is instilled into the pantry's lifeblood.

Within the last few years, a partnership with two long-standing island gems was arranged to bring the pantry more fresh choices throughout the year. Piggly Wiggly grocer on the island's south end, and Carolina Seafood and Produce, north island, are part of Sandalwood's Totes of Love program. Providence Presbyterian Church volunteers assist the pantry staff to pick up and fill bags with first-quality vegetables, fruit, milk, nuts, and plenty of meats and seafood.

Sandalwood has a tangible dream to build the first amphibious resilient pantry on Hilton Head Island. They're optimistic that this vision will become a reality within the next two years, as current space is tight. Though grateful for their present location, a secure and devoted place of their own would expand their services and ensure their clients are safe by choice, not chance, when the next hurricane hits.

With nourishment comes strength, and Sandalwood Community Food Pantry is blessed to help accomplish that end. Without the vision and tenacious work by Pierson and the devoted staff of committed volunteers, Sandalwood wouldn't succeed as the difference maker it is in the community.

Several ways to help in their passion for feeding the hungry would include donating food, donating funds, and volunteering. "No gift of the heart can be too big or too small," Pierson said. Their website provides the details. Sandalwood Community Food Pantry wishes everyone peace, health, and a full and happy Santa tummy! 🍎

For more information, visit [www.sandalwoodfoodpantry.com](http://www.sandalwoodfoodpantry.com).