



community development partnership

Creating opportunities for people to live, work, and thrive on the Lower Cape

The Fox & Crow: A need to address food security head on

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Trudy Vermehren
Owner, The Fox & Crow Cafe



Trudy Vermehren, owner of The Fox & Crow

As the owner of a restaurant, Trudy Vermehren faced numerous challenges this year in the wake of the pandemic. Resourcefulness combined with a love for and a desire to help the community yielded success in ways she had not anticipated.

Trudy opened the Fox & Crow in 2018. She had spent much of her life working front of house restaurant jobs, before starting her own landscaping business. Originally, she wanted to open a small coffee shop and create a space for people in the community to gather, but the location she was looking at fell through. Eventually she found the perfect spot in Wellfleet. As it was much bigger than the first location Trudy adjusted her business plan to open a full restaurant, serving fresh and organic food.

Trudy approached the CDP’s Director of Business & Credit Programs, Pam Andersen, to apply for a micro-loan to cover startup costs and buy equipment. She had significant experience from running her landscaping business and Pam helped her to apply some of this knowledge to her restaurant.

“One thing I’ve learned is what I’m good at and what I’m not, and Pam helped me delegate some of those tasks,” recalls Trudy.

Trudy was optimistic for the Fox & Crow’s third season, when the coronavirus forced them to close. Almost immediately after Governor Baker issued the stay at home order, shuttering schools and businesses, Trudy was approached by her friend and lawyer Bruce Bierhans with \$250 to cover meals for students in need. While they were formulating their plan, the Nauset school district announced that

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they would be providing meals to students, so the two quickly adapted their plan to one that served the entire community.

They set up a GoFundMe page to see if they could raise more money. Within 24 hours they received \$11,000 dollars donations and the total soon climbed to \$38,000. After seeing how much money was coming in Trudy and Bruce established Common Table, a non-profit run out of the Fox & Crow. “It really alerted me to the need that is out there in the community, and how big a problem food insecurity is” says Trudy.

For the first couple months they had a dedicated group of volunteers working the kitchen and managing the program including friends, restaurant workers who were temporarily out of work, and even a couple from Texas who was taking a long-planned sabbatical on the Cape when the outbreak began. “The couple had experience managing non-profits, and helped us set up tracking spreadsheets to keep us organized,” says Trudy.

Throughout the summer the group refined and simplified their menu, and switched from pickup to delivery. Eventually the operation was running like a well-oiled machine. “We got a lot of feedback from people that they looked forward to their deliveries every day. Although there’s not a ton of interaction, it means a lot to people,” notes Trudy. At the peak of their operation Common Table was serving 150 meals a day.

As businesses started to re-open the Fox & Crow began preparations. Indoor dining was not an option. “Thankfully we had been planning to add outdoor seating this summer, so we already had all of the furniture,” says Trudy. The bar was moved outside, and tables were set up among the vegetable gardens around the restaurant. The outdoor seating allowed for more guests than their indoor seating in previous seasons, while their gardens provided them with organic produce.

Trudy and her crew lost some of their regular volunteers who needed to go back to work. In fact, an ongoing challenge she had to overcome this season was finding workers. International workers make up a large portion of the Cape’s seasonal workforce, including at the Fox & Crow. “On a typical day we would have four to five people working the kitchen, but this summer we would usually have two. Most nights we were without a dishwasher,” recalls Trudy. Due COVID19 related travel restrictions, changes to the foreign worker visa program and occupancy limits for rentals used by seasonal workers was severely limited.

Like most businesses this season, the Fox & Crow operated on a very thin margin. “If the weather was a little worse, or if staff got sick we might not have made it,” says Trudy.

Throughout it all, Common Table continued to serve meals to those in need. As the summer progressed they sent letters to their current clients and found that many of them had returned to work and no longer needed their service. Eventually the daily list was whittled down from 150 to around 60.

To date, Trudy and her crew have provided over 15,000 meals to the Lower Cape community. She expects that their client list will decrease over time as the local food bank is now open an extra day each week, other food kitchens in town are reopening as their volunteers feel safe and people are continuing to return to work. Regardless, as long as there is need, Trudy is dedicated to continuing to provide meals throughout the ongoing health crisis.



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Trudy is continuing to look towards the future and planning for next spring and summer. For now, she focused on providing meals through Common Table and keeping the café open one night during the week. “It’s all about pivoting and figuring out what’s next,” she says, “How can I offer a little bit more without putting too big of a burden on my staff.”

We are thankful for the service that Trudy and the crew at Common Table have provided to the community during this crisis, and we wish Fox & Crow the best of luck as they continue to adapt and overcome the challenges presented by the coronavirus.

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