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Helping those in need is still the goal as Meet Each Need with Dignity celebrates 50 years

A good idea to help struggling families is sustained over 50 years thanks to donations by generous San Fernando Valley residents



MEND founders, Ed and Carolyn Rose opened their hearts and home in 1971 to help poor families in the northeast San Fernando Valley. They now celebrate 50 years of service to the San Fernando Valley. (Photo courtesy of MEND)

By **DENNIS MCCARTHY** |

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“When it rains, look for rainbows; when it is dark, look for stars.” – Oscar Wilde

The great ones always start small. One person has an idea and passes it on to another, and pretty soon it grows into a cause. If it's a good cause, it flourishes and evolves into a movement that takes on a life of its own.



It goes from a garage in Mission Hills in 1971 to a multi-million dollar, non-profit corporation in 2021 that puts food on the table, clothes in the closets and hope in the hearts of more than 1,500 families in the San Fernando Valley who desperately need it.

It's called MEND — Meet Each Need with Dignity (with a big emphasis on dignity) — and it's celebrating 50 years since Ed and Carolyn Rose opened their garage door on Mayall Street, and invited the needy in to feed and dress their families with donations from the parishioners at the Rose's church, Our Lady of Peace Catholic Church in North Hills.

"We were just regular people who wanted to do something for others with less than we had, nothing else," said Carolyn, who was a stay-at-home mom raising five children in a house without enough bedrooms or bathrooms, but plenty of love.

"Some of our friends thought we were nuts, having all these strangers come to our house. I think they thought people would steal things from us, but they never did. They were good people who just needed a little help at this point in their lives."

Good people like Erika Contreras, who searched out the Roses to thank when MEND expanded its services and opened a new, multi-service center in 2007 on an old, rundown trailer park lot on San Fernando Road where she had lived with her parents and five brothers and sisters growing up.

"Our trailer was in the second row, over where the parking spaces are now," Erika said. "We had nothing. MEND gave us the beds and mattresses we slept on, the tables and chairs we sat at, the food we ate."

She brought out an old snapshot of herself as a 6-year-old opening Christmas presents with her brothers and sisters. "MEND gave us those presents, too, but the greatest gift they gave everyone was hope. The idea we could succeed, and that people cared," she said.

She had driven up from Orange County, where she was a legislative assistant to a state assemblyman – just to thank the Roses for pointing her to the rainbows and the stars when she was a little girl looking for hope.

Good people including Baltazar Martinez, who would walk the six-mile round trip from the single-car garage in Sylmar where his family lived to pick up food and blankets from MEND with his mother.

"I remember waiting in line with her for that box of food and the blankets we slept on that covered the cold cement floor, seeing how thankful she was," Baltazar said. "MEND was a blessing to our family, to a lot of families. We depended on them to survive."

With him, Baltazar had brought five, large boxes filled with donated toys from the students at Mission College to give to the kids now waiting in line with their own thankful mothers. Ed took the presents and shook the young man's hand. He was visibly touched.

"You're everything my wife and I hoped MEND would be," he said. "We always wanted the people who received the help to give it back one day – pass it on like a daisy chain."

In these last 50 years, nothing has been able to break that daisy chain the Roses and their friends started, not even COVID. It failed last year, and is back again with the delta strain now, forcing MEND to close its doors at the center again for all its walk in services, except food distribution.

It should have crippled them, but it has only made them stronger and more determined. In many ways, it's taken them back to their roots – to the garages and homes of people like the Roses who still drop in from time to time to visit.

MEND's success doesn't depend on a multi-service office building, it depends on the same thing today it did in 1971.

People.



Help is either in your heart or it's not. You either step up to do what you can, or you look the other way. No charitable organization in the Valley has done more to meet each need with dignity than MEND.

They have fed more than 216,000 needy residents since the coronavirus breakout, and sent enough food to other relief agencies to feed tens of thousands more.

They can't do it without the help of hundreds of donors and volunteers who refuse to look the other way.

“The Oscar Wilde quote comes to mind often,” said MEND’s president and CEO Janet Marinaccio, talking to her supporters. “Through some of the darkest times, you have been the rainbow and the stars for so many struggling people. You have enabled us to reach more than 50,000 people in our community with information on COVID-19, vaccinations and messages of encouragement.





Janet Marinaccio, pres and CEO of MEND. (Photo courtesy of MEND)

“The legacy started by Ed and Carolyn Rose, along with a group of friends and family, continues to this day. You have done incredible things for the most vulnerable people in the San Fernando Valley. Thank you.”

Hope — it’s up there somewhere between the rainbows and the stars.



For more information on the many services MEND offers, or to become a donor or volunteer, visit its website, mendpoverty.org, or call 818-897-2443.

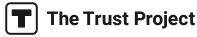
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