

COMMUNITY SERVICE

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Food for Thought ...

It all started out innocently enough. Just another routine visit to the grocery store to buy a few things to make a nice, home cooked dinner.

But Nicole Lobaugh couldn't possibly have known when she began pushing her shopping cart through the grocery store that day that she was about to have a profound impact on the life of a total stranger ... and one that would set her on a course to do the very same thing for many other tired, frightened, and anxious people.

Nicole, a second-year associate at Dickie, McCamey & Chilcote, was standing in the checkout line, her grocery cart filled with all manner of fresh groceries. As she waited in line, she couldn't help but notice the man in front of her, who was waiting with a stack of frozen dinners.

The two struck up a casual conversation, and Nicole quickly discovered that the frozen dinners were for the man and his wife, who had taken up temporary residence at Family House in Shadyside while she recovered from a kidney transplant: a kidney she received from her own daughter. The man's wife was the one who normally did all the cooking in their family but, now that she was too sick to cook, he was doing whatever he could to help her, and frozen dinners were the limit of his cooking abilities.

"I certainly counted my blessings that evening," she said later. "I was blessed to have met a man who loved his wife so profoundly that he couldn't help but sing her praises in the checkout line of a grocery store to a perfect stranger. That is true love and it's most genuine expression of hope. This story is about them."

His story touched her. They never introduced themselves and never mentioned their names but, as they parted company and went their separate ways, she couldn't let go of the story of this quiet man and his private struggle.

The next day she called Family House and inquired about the man she met at the grocery store. She didn't want his name, and she didn't want to leave hers. But she wanted to give him something ... anything that might make his life and that of his ailing wife just a little bit brighter, if even for an hour. She had an idea to give them the only thing she knew they could really use — a good hot meal.

Inspired by her idea, she then called the owner of her favorite restaurant, Girasole's in Shadyside, and had two menus sent to Family House. She instructed the staff to have her mystery friend and his wife order anything they wanted from the menu. The next day, Nicole personally delivered their special-ordered dinner, served hot and delicious in their Family House quarters, completely anonymously.

News of Nicole's random act of kindness soon caught the attention of Family House executive director Christie Knott, who wrote in her monthly newsletter about the anonymous woman who touched the lives of this troubled couple with a simple hot meal. Sitting in his office one day, Dickie McCamey & Chilcote shareholder Ted Struk, himself a Family House board member, was reading that newsletter and saw the story of the nameless woman and her generosity.

"Mr. Struk called me into his office and showed me the Family House newsletter," Nicole said. "The article never mentioned my name, but somehow — don't ask me how — he knew it was me ... We both had tears in our eyes."

That experience led Nicole to offer her time as a volunteer for Family House, where she spends one evening a month welcoming guests, providing them with clean linens for their rooms, helping them navigate around Pittsburgh, and just lending a sympathetic ear after a difficult day with doctors and hospitals.

"It's a humbling experience for me," says Nicole. "I think it's important to give your time to people who really need it, and it reminds me of what's most important in life."

Coincidentally, another Dickie McCamey associate, Dave McKenery, has also started volunteer service at Family House.

McKenery says that about a year ago, he contacted Family House to see what he could do to help. They eagerly accepted his offer and directed him to a couple of volunteer committees, including the organization's famous polo event fundraiser. Dave embraced the unfamiliar role of fundraising with zeal, contacting numerous institutions for sponsorship support.

Looking ahead, Dave has already pledged to continue working with the polo committee, as well as helping Family House celebrate its 25th anniversary in 2008.