

## **Community Service Casual Day: Interns Serve Restaurant-Quality Lunch to Homeless**

**By: Judge Catherine P. McEwen**



**Pictured L to R:** Matt McKenna (Vanderbilt), Morgan Constable (WMU Cooley), Judge McEwen, Saeed Bramwell-Gordon (Vanderbilt), Bryant Lee (Emory), and Dan Chehouri (Stetson)

Some of our summer interns changed up their field trip experience from forays into federal and state courtrooms to a community service opportunity at Tampa's Trinity Cafe, a restaurant that serves homeless adults and children in a "sit-down" dining atmosphere.

The Cafe's mantra is to treat guests with dignity and respect (similar to our Court's motto!). The group helped out as servers, table hosts, a bus boy, condiment stockers, and clean-up crew. And then they lunched on the same delicious fare that they had served the guests. Their last task was to help set up the dining room for the next day's guests. For information about Trinity Cafe and volunteering opportunities, go here: [www.trinitycafe.org/](http://www.trinitycafe.org/).

Although they had to leave their serving aprons behind, the group took with them some good impressions about Trinity's operation and guests. Here are some observations from the interns:

*Volunteering at Trinity Cafe was a truly eye-opening experience. Aside from serving those in need, it was rewarding to see the sense of community present between the volunteers and guests. One dedicated volunteer explained how incredible it is to see repeat guests get on their feet and share their success stories and overwhelming gratitude for the establishment. He explained that Trinity Cafe volunteers provide stability in the lives of the needy through their mission to serve. The positivity in the air was unforgettable. -Morgan Constable*

*At Trinity Cafe, I felt that we were brightening days, one bite at a time. – Saeed Bramwell-Gordon*

*Volunteering at Trinity Cafe was a wonderful experience. For many people this is their only meal for the day, so to volunteer for an organization that helps people when they need it the most is really rewarding. What makes Trinity Cafe stand out in my mind, though, is the restaurant experience. The people served are not lucky enough to always enjoy a restaurant dining experience. However, the meal provided by Trinity Cafe allows them to forget about their situation for a little bit and enjoy the food like so many others. Trinity Cafe is a one of a kind place, and I look forward to volunteering more of my time there. –Matt McKenna*

*Trinity Cafe serves not only the homeless but also the oft forgotten working poor. –Bryant Lee*

*In an effort to make a positive difference in our community, Judge McEwen invited her legal interns to join her in helping serve lunch to the homeless at Trinity Cafe. Trinity Cafe offers free three-course meals during the week and a free breakfast on the weekends to those in need. Trinity Cafe is able to offer this charitable service thanks to donations raised from members around our community. As a first-time volunteer, I had no idea what to expect. Upon arrival, I observed a large group of community members congregating around the front doors. Next, I proceeded to walk into the Cafe. I was instantly greeted by some of the more experienced volunteers. After a brief tutorial on how the lunch was to be served, we were off to work. The volunteers were split into groups of two, and each group was responsible for one table. One volunteer was in charge of serving while the other volunteer was asked to sit and interact with the guests. Initially, I was apprehensive about having to interact with the guests. I was not sure what to talk about or if they would even want to talk at all. To my surprise, the guests I served were gregarious, outgoing, and positive. One guest in particular left me with a very memorable experience. This guest sat quietly at my table and kept to herself. The volunteer I was paired with attempted to interact with this guest but was unable to because of the language barrier. Once I noticed she could only speak Spanish, I jumped at the opportunity to help. As a child, I was raised by a single mother, who migrated here from Caracas, Venezuela. Financial struggles and language barriers were two things I was very familiar with at a young age. After getting to know this guest, I was immediately reminded of my past. She was a single mother who migrated here from Columbia with her son. She told me about how proud she was that her son was doing well in his school. About half way through her meal, she began to pack up the remains of her plate into a container. She looked at me and said that she saves her meals so she can feed her son after school. I was speechless. No matter what struggles she was currently facing, properly raising her son was her first priority, and I truly admired her for that. The experience I had at Trinity Cafe was as enlightening as it was memorable. I plan on returning to volunteer at the Trinity Cafe in the near future. –Daniel Chehouri*

Thank you, interns, for being open to taking a break from the legal grind to share your positive, youthful energy with some of our unfortunate brothers and sisters!