

## Naperville CARES helps people sustain self-sufficiency

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Catch a glimpse of the people visiting Northern Illinois University's Naperville Center on Saturday evening and your first thought probably won't be of neighbors in need.

But don't let the glitz and signature dishes from 20 of the city's finest restaurants fool you.

Because behind all those tempting treats is an organization trying to raise money for people who come face to face with economic challenges each and every day.

The group is called Naperville CARES (Community Acting in Response to Economic Stress) and it has been working for several years to help residents in need attain self-sufficiency.



Naperville CARES will play host to its annual Cuisine for a Cause fundraiser Saturday at Northern Illinois University's Naperville Center. The event features signature dishes from 20 Naperville restaurants and raises money to help residents in need attain self-sufficiency.



Tickets for Saturday's party are \$75 and include food, drink, dancing and entertainment.

In times of crisis, CARES assists those residents meet such basic needs as paying their rent and utility bills.

To have enough money to do that, the group is partnering for the fifth time with My Chef Catering to sponsor Cuisine for a Cause, its major fundraiser of the year.

This year's event runs from 7 to 10:30 p.m. Saturday at NIU's Naperville Center, 1120 E. Diehl Road.

Margie Tarpey, Naperville CARES vice president, recently shared some of her group's goals and accomplishments with the Daily Herald.

Q. What is your mission?

A. To provide resources to people within the Naperville community who need assistance to avoid homelessness and attain self-sufficiency.

CARES coordinates the work of Naperville congregations and public and private social service organizations to provide financial assistance for basic human needs, such as rent and utilities, during a crisis situation.

Q. How do you work toward accomplishing that goal?

A. Naperville CARES has 40 trained volunteers who conduct interviews with potential clients, handle inquiries and determine needs. The professional case manager conducts interviews and allocates the resources those clients need.

Q. Who do you serve?

A. The target population is Naperville residents or members of a Naperville congregation. Last fiscal year, CARES served 1,521 clients, and 62 percent of those were female.

Q. When and why did the organization start? How has it grown?

A. Naperville CARES was founded because of a critical need in our community and a strong and caring desire to fill it.

In 1997, a group of parishioners from a local church asked the question, "In light of our current economic climate and the people who are in crisis as a result of it, what is our responsibility as people of faith?" The answer was action.

The group rallied other congregations and organizations and together they conducted a study of social needs and services in the community.

Based on that information, Naperville CARES was founded and initiated the following programs: The Car Donation Program, which gives people the transportation to obtain and maintain employment; the Emergency Assistance Program for those who can, under normal circumstances, afford their rent but might need help out of a temporary situation; and the Childcare Assistance Program, which helps parents pay for quality child care while working.

Since opening its office in 2001, CARES has responded to more than 5,000 clients in need. During fiscal 2007-08, CARES received requests for services from 653 households and gave out \$109,450 and 39 cars.

Q. What kind of successes have you had?

A. We had a woman who was desperate and could not stop her voice from breaking when she spoke with the CARES volunteer.

Her husband had left her two years ago, leaving her with the house and mortgage payments. A seasonal employee, he helped from time to time with the monthly payment, but it wasn't enough.

She lost her full-time job at a large medical clinic two years ago and was only able to get part-time work. She also baby-sat for her granddaughter until her daughter moved out and then she lost that income.

"I've applied to four temporary agencies," she said, "and they expect a lot of calls next month but I can't make this month's mortgage payment or catch up on my utilities."

She contacted every place she was referred: the county, LIHEAP and the township. Her church had helped substantially in the recent past and she was reluctant to contact them again. Tearfully, she asked if CARES could help.

CARES was able to put together a financial package from both internal and external sources so that she could pay her mortgage. The case manager urged her to continue contacting several other resources for help.

She worked hard at finding a better job, and when a volunteer called her last, she said she had gotten two full-time offers. When she came to the office to pick up her mortgage check, she couldn't thank CARES enough.

Q. What challenges does your organization face?

A. With the economy slipping, CARES faces the challenge of serving an increased number of Naperville residents who are experiencing financial difficulty.

A cold winter means increased heating bills, and the daily papers are filled with stories of mortgage foreclosures.

Our organization works diligently to raise the funding needed for our clients.

Q. What do you wish the community at large knew about the organization?

A. CARES would like for all of Naperville to be aware of our group and the programs it supports for those in need. Most people who spent a week at CARES would be surprised at the number of fellow citizens who are poor and struggling to make ends meet each and every month.

Q. How can readers get involved?

A. Volunteers are needed to work in the office, either by working directly with clients or by assisting with clerical duties.

A great way to meet energetic and dedicated folks is to volunteer to work on CARES' annual fundraiser, Cuisine for a Cause.

If you are interested in volunteering, call the CARES office at (630) 369-0200.

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### **If you go**

What: Cuisine for a Cause

When: 7 to 10:30 p.m. Saturday

Where: Northern Illinois University's Naperville Center, 1120 E. Diehl Road

Tickets: \$75, includes food, drink, dancing, entertainment and wine tasting

Info: For tickets, call Al Dinon at (630) 725-6736; for general information, visit [www.napervillecares.org](http://www.napervillecares.org)

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### **Vital statistics**

Number of requests for help: CARES received requests for assistance from 653 households (a total of 1,521 clients) last year

Sources of funding: Individuals, congregations, corporations, fundraising events, government awards, foundations, holiday appeal, civic organizations, United Way of Naperville

Number of full-time employees: One professional case manager

Number of volunteers: 40

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### **How to donate**

Mail-in address: 618 West Fifth Ave.; Naperville, IL 60563

How to volunteer

Phone: 630) 369-0200

Web site: [Napervillecares.org](http://Napervillecares.org)