

United Passaic Org. debuts food truck initiative at jam-packed MLK Day of Service highlighted by Andrea Navedo book signing

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Monday, January 15

11 AM — 3:00 PM

Mt. Zion Baptist Church
857 Main Ave.
Passaic, NJ 07055



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United Passaic Org. debuts food truck initiative at jam-packed MLK Day of Service highlighted by Andrea Navedo book signing.

Photo Credit: Courtesy of United Passaic Organization

United Passaic Organization (UPO) will debut a transformative food truck initiative, the United Passaic Organization Community Cafe Mobile Food Pantry, during its Martin Luther King Day of Service Event on Monday, Jan. 15. Chief Executive Officer Dr. Janelle C. Hall, driven by funding from the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs, spearheaded the new project to address food insecurity in Passaic County by procuring a food truck to deliver meals directly to individuals facing challenges in accessing nutritious food.

"It is fitting to unveil the food truck on Martin Luther King Day," Dr. Hall remarked. "He had a dream that affected so many people, and this food truck has been a dream for us at UPO."

UPO's Martin Luther King Day of Service Event will be at Mt. Zion Baptist Church (857 Main Ave., Passaic, NJ 07055) from 11 a.m. - 3 p.m. UPO will provide to-go bags of prepared meals and groceries to those in attendance. Joining the event is Jane the Virgin actress Andrea Navedo, present from 12 p.m. - 2 p.m., engaging with students and the community about her book *Our Otherness Is Our Strength: Wisdom from the Boogie Down Bronx*, followed by a book signing.

Tickets for the event are available online at: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/upo-and-more-than-bootstraps-presents-mlk-day-of-service-2024-tickets-773834558997>

The Day of Service will conclude at 7 p.m. at Mt. Pilgrim Missionary Baptist Church (163 Autumn St., Passaic, NJ 07055) with an MLK Service by the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance of Passaic and Vicinity. The

initiative is conducted in partnership with More Than Bootstraps, which recently received a \$750 award from Citizens Back to further its mission of assisting low-income, first-generation students in accessing and succeeding in higher education.

Securing the food truck was a serendipitous process for UPO. After searching far and wide, Dr. Hall and UPO's Deiby Martinez discovered the De Los Santos family and their Aplatanaos Food Truck right in their hometown Passaic.

"I found it right in our backyard, here in Passaic," Dr. Hall exclaimed. "This fully equipped food truck aligns exactly with our mission to address food insecurity in our community."

Aplatanaos Food Truck, known for its popular pasteles en hojas, gained rapid popularity, prompting the family to seek an upgrade after two years due to overwhelming demand. Now, the focus of the food truck is shifting from serving the community to supporting others.

The collaboration between UPO and the De Los Santos family marks a significant moment in the organization's history. UPO previously partnered with Newark-based United Community Corporation, providing hot breakfast through the UCC Cafe Mobile Feeding program from June 2022 to December 2022, serving over 5,000 people during the eight months.

The experience with UCC highlighted the pressing need for such services in the community, prompting UPO to replicate and expand the initiative. UPO received approval to purchase the food truck in September 2023, securing funding through the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs' non-discretionary funds program.

Passaic City, ranked No. 9 on New Jersey's Economic Development Authority's list of food deserts, is the second-highest-rated food desert in Passaic County. UPO currently addresses food insecurity through pantries at Mt Pilgrim Missionary Baptist Church and Union Baptist Church, as well as the UJAMAA Mobile Cafe Community Refrigerator. Having assisted over 10,000 people in 2023, UPO anticipates a significant expansion of its impact with the debut of the food truck in 2024.

"It's surreal that we're going to have this program," Dr. Hall expressed. "This marks a turning point for UPO, and we are excited to make a lasting impact on our community."

For those interested in supporting the United Passaic Organization financially or through volunteering, visit <https://unitedpassaic.com/>. For more information about UPO's events and services, including the upcoming Community Baby Shower on Friday, please contact info@unitedpassaic.org, call 973-472-2478, or visit the office at 1 Howe Ave., Suite 301, Passaic, NJ 07055.