



Community spotlight: offering a hand “up” to the food and beverage industry

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As the coronavirus (COVID-19) spread to every corner of the world, its effects also seeped into nearly every industry, organization and home. Those in the food and beverage space were arguably some of the hardest hit during the ongoing pandemic: The impact of strict shutdowns and restrictions wiped out nearly 2.5 million jobs. Along with their paychecks, workers lost health insurance coverage. They exhausted childcare resources. Some were forced to forfeit their vehicles to make ends meet — a painful cycle that then made getting, and getting to, new work opportunities nearly impossible.

For the team at Southern Smoke, stories like these are far too familiar. And they are determined to change the narrative.

BUILDING A SAFETY NET

Since 2015, the nonprofit Southern Smoke Foundation has served as a crisis organization for people under emergency situations in the food and beverage industry. Much like Sedgwick, Southern Smoke is focused on taking care of others when they need it most, whether it be after a natural disaster or during a health crisis. And the foundation stepped up quickly to expand its services at the onset of the pandemic, when they received 20,000 applications for assistance from food and beverage workers... *in the first week alone.*

THE RIPPLE EFFECT

To bounce back after a crisis often requires a hand “up.” From friends and families. Employers and coworkers. And from our community. The Southern Smoke team knows just how true this is — many of them were furloughed from the industry themselves. It’s why, as founder Chris Shepherd explains, Southern Smoke was created in the first place: so the people and organizations in the food and beverage industry could “take care of our own.”

Side by side with the Southern Smoke “dream team” on the front lines of this important mission, Catarina Bill has witnessed the ripple effect unemployment has on a food and beverage workers’ livelihood. But thankfully, as the foundation’s director of case management and community partnerships, she is part of the solution.

When one unemployed individual suffered a major brain injury, Catarina and the Southern Smoke team were able to provide funding



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for him to be admitted to a rehab facility. Without health insurance, he would have been released from the hospital without a rehab option. It's just one example of the charitable work they're doing to protect and support the food and beverage community.

JOIN THE MOVEMENT

Many food and beverage businesses are getting back up on their feet as COVID-19 restrictions lift, but we haven't

forgotten about the loss they endured throughout the last year and a half. Inspired by Southern Smoke's mission, Sedgwick donated to the foundation's Chicago Restaurant Workers Relief Fund. Colleagues and event attendees at this year's Chicago-based RIMS conference were encouraged to do their part by ordering local food for pick up or delivery, or safely visiting restaurants in the community to generate funds back into the industry.

You can hear firsthand about the power of the Southern Smoke Foundation and its Chicago Restaurant Workers Relief Fund in our video conversation with Catarina. If you'd like to support and provide relief for those impacted, we invite you to join us in donating to the Southern Smoke Foundation.

Together, we can continue to keep taking care of people at the heart of everything we do.



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RESOURCE

Southern Smoke Foundation
<https://southernSmoke.org/>

