



Fraternal Order of Eagles members Cindy McLean and Johnny Madrigal pause to bask in the magic of their labors at the 2019 MS Alliance Christmas Luncheon.

The Gift of Giving



Cindy McLean and Johnny Madrigal warm hearts and bellies over the holidays.

by Joy Blackburn, MSA Staff Writer



Since 1967, the Fraternal Order of Eagles Auxiliary #143 has hosted Holiday Meals for the MS Alliance of Southern Colorado. Over the years, the Eagles Aerie has provided MSA clients close to 8,000 plates of lovingly prepared meals, plus desert, décor, and raffles. It takes considerable planning and expense to pull this off each year, not to mention the sheer effort involved. More importantly, it takes a real love for other people and a desire to lift them up.

On Saturday, December 10th, Cindy McLean and Johnny Madrigal, along with a team of volunteers, will host the Eagle's 53rd Holiday Lunch for the MS Alliance, and their sleeves are already rolled up.

"We enjoy what we do," Cindy told me during our recent conversation. "The team works hard at these charitable events, and it creates such a great feeling between us."

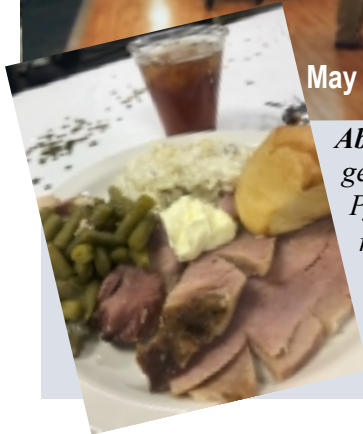
"We have a set group of people that comes in to help us every year," Johnny added. "All volunteers, all Eagles with a few exceptions." Johnny, who once served as a butler to a Lt. Colonel and his wife, feels right at home managing these holiday events. "We experiment with different entrees. Turkey and tenderloin are our fall-backs, but it's fun to try new things."



The Fraternal Order of Eagles is an international non-profit organization uniting fraternally in the spirit of liberty, truth, justice, and equality, to make human life more desirable by lessening its ills and promoting peace, prosperity, gladness and hope. Established in Seattle in 1898, the organization founded Mother's Day and was the driving force behind Social Security. Its past membership includes five American Presidents.



May your Days be Aerie and Light!



*Above: The 2018 event gets underway. Greg Pfeiffer, center, will later reemerge as Santa Claus. Left: **Better than Cracker Barrel!** The meals coming out of the Aerie kitchen are fresh, balanced and delicious!*



Above: Eagles Auxiliary Members and Event Volunteers stand ready to receive their guests in 2017. From left to right, front row: Bailey, Randi, Virginia and Connie. Back row: Ashley, Johnny, Greg and Gary.

Years ago, the entire meal had to be donated, and the team spent most of their time soliciting area stores and even local eateries. Now they are given an annual budget. “We’re funded for 100 plates,” Cindy, said.

Johnny added, “But we cook for 130 to 140.” Both of them laughed, leaving unaddressed how they manage to stretch their budget by an additional 40%!

The Holiday Lunch preparation uses the Aerie’s commercial kitchen to its fullest. “We’ll come in at 6:00 AM to fire up the stoves,” Johnny told me, “And we’ll work straight through to noon when the first plates are served. Everything is fresh.”

Cindy, who once ran a cleaning firm that readied newly constructed homes for their buyers, is comfortable with both chaos and deadlines. She told me, “One year we had a box of treat-laden centerpieces that we had planned

to give out as door prizes at the end of the lunch. But someone left the box in the dining room,” she laughed. “As the guests arrived, they started eating the door prizes!” This also meant there would be no table centerpieces. It was a disaster! But like the pro she was, Cindy rolled with it. “The guests were happy, and that’s all that matters.”

Both Cindy and Johnny enjoy working with Nikki Pfeiffer, Executive Director of the MS Alliance. “Nikki makes things so much easier,” Cindy exclaimed. “She will bring entertainment and gifts,



Santa poses for a photo with the barbershop quartet in 2019. These amazing singers, members of the America The Beautiful Chorus, were the evening’s featured entertainment.

and she has some great helpers who take some of the burden off of our volunteers. And she's so grateful for everything we do, even when we personally feel like we fell short."

"Which never happens," Johnny added, causing the two to laugh.

The annual lunches began in 1967 when Margaret and Bob Turner selected the MS Alliance for this seasonal outreach. The Turners ran the program for 44 years — well into their retirement. In 2011, they finally turned over the operation to their two best volunteer assistants.

"We love it," Cindy told me. "It's so nice to see everyone enjoying themselves. They talk to our servers and give us cards, and it's just... so satisfying to make someone happy."

"We and our volunteers are like a family," Johnny said. "And you know, other people have helped me so much over the years, I feel like this is my small way of giving back."

At this point in the interview, a dog ran in and began barking. Johnny addressed the

dog while Cindy apologized for the interruption. It occurred to me how unusually well Cindy and Johnny work together. I found myself asking, "Are you two a couple?"

They both chuckled. The question was "off menu," and they paused while they decided who was going to answer.

Cindy spoke first. "We both joined the Eagles to help others. 'People Helping People.' You hear that a lot."

Johnny admitted, "It brought us together. Two older people like us. That doesn't happen very often."

"We've been a couple for about 19 years." Cindy added.

It was wonderful news about two truly wonderful people, and the perfect way to end our interview. By the time we said good-bye, I felt that I not only knew Cindy and Johnny, but that I lived in a smaller, much happier world. If this is what the Order of Eagles set out to do at their 1898 founding, allow me to say, "Mission Accomplished." ✨

Fun Fact:

The landmark building on East 21st and Broadway that houses the Fraternal Order of Eagles #143 was once The Hall of Presidents — A wax museum that was a popular tour site for school children and visitors to the Pikes Peak region.

