

STONE SOUP

to the Rescue!

Tri-C culinary instructor is on a mission to eliminate food waste

Giovanna Mingrone has a T-shirt she likes to wear. It bears the words “I am in it for the hugs,” and that is indeed part of what motivates her to run Stone Soup Cleveland.

Mingrone’s day job is teaching at Cuyahoga Community College’s Hospitality Management Center, where she is a member of the adjunct faculty. Her side project is running Stone Soup, a food recovery service. She and her skeleton crew collect perfectly edible food that has, for one reason or another, been sentenced to the dumpster. They pick the food up and deliver it anywhere that they know it will be eaten.

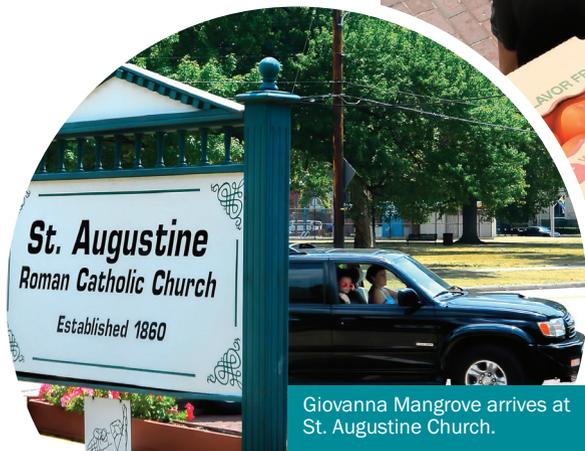
In addition to the hugs, she does this because she has spent her life working with food and can’t stand to see it go to waste.

“Our mission is to keep food out of the dumpster and feed people,” Mingrone said. She estimates that she has rescued 10,000 pounds of food with her 2002 Toyota 4Runner.

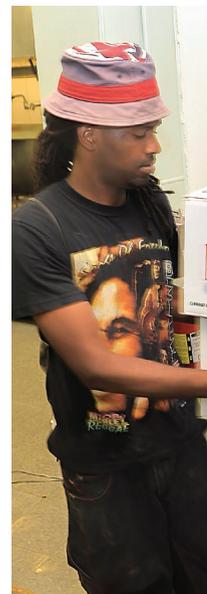
Mingrone founded Stone Soup in April 2015. She deals primarily with produce, like the two cases of peppers she picked up recently from Premier Produce, a supplier to many of Northeast Ohio’s high-end restaurants. The reason it didn’t want the peppers? They were too big.



Giovanna Mangrove arrives at St. Augustine Church.



Giovanna Mingrone, left, Joseph Smith, center and Samuel Peyton unload produce at St. Augustine.





Samuel Peyton carries produce from the West Side Market to the St. Augustine Hunger Center.



Giovanna Mingrone, back left, receives help from volunteers unloading produce to the St. Augustine Hunger Center.



St. Augustine Hunger Center's Sister Corita, left, talks with volunteer Isabel Murphy.



Volunteer Samuel Peyton, left, helps load donated produce to the refrigeration unit with chef Wilbur Hayes.

Stone Soup corrects a wasteful prejudice that restaurants and consumers have against food considered ugly or unusable for some other arbitrary reason. Mingrone considers that same food, first and foremost, edible. “We don’t need to be growing any more food in this country,” she said. There is more than enough if we use all that we have.

Much of the food collected by Stone Soup gets delivered to area food pantries. The jumbo peppers, for instance, went to St. Augustine Church in Tremont. “They serve a lot of people, and they have space. They’re real chefs. They know what they are doing over there,” she said.

But not everyone does, so Mingrone also takes the time to teach people how to prepare food. Rescuing food is a fruitless endeavor if it’s left to rot because no one knows how to cook it, so educational outreach is a component of Stone Soup.

Stone Soup’s board includes two Tri-C alums: Deb Fekete and Brian Bendlak. They, along with a handful of Tri-C culinary students, also help with food runs.

Stone Soup, a food recovery service, is on a mission to reduce food waste.

The organization’s biggest challenges include having no place to call home, Mingrone’s beater Toyota and needing the technical expertise that comes from grant writers and those with experience in the non-profit world. Those interested in volunteering or donating food or goods should contact Mingrone through Stone Soup’s Facebook page, www.facebook.com/stonesoupclc.

Mingrone is working on a line of vinegars — she recently finished a batch of cantaloupe vinegar — in an effort to create a revenue stream for Stone Soup, but her heart is in rescuing food and getting it into people’s stomachs.

“You get emotional when you do a meal,” she said. “You see how thankful people are.”