



WELCOME HOME *Gala*



THURSDAY
April 27th, 2023
5:30PM - 8:30PM
At the newly renovated
 Yates Illuminates
 3260 Davenport Street

RESTORING DIGNITY

Katie Weitz
 Honorary Guest
Nancy + Greg Thrasher
 Angel Award Recipient
Liz Hagestad
 Gala Chair



Sponsors

**RESTORING
DIGNITY**

THRASHER[®]
FOUNDATION REPAIR



HF

**HEIDER FAMILY
FOUNDATION**

GRACE
homes



your energy partner[®]

Burlington
CAPITAL



*Natalie & Eric
Petersen*



Program

**RESTORING
DIGNITY**

5:30pm - Doors open, food and drinks available

5:35pm - Performances & open building exploration

7:15pm - Program starts

- **Emcee:** Marlo Lundak
- **Special Guest:** Katie Weitz
- **Founder's Remarks:** Hannah Vlach
- **Angel Award Recipient:** Nancy and Greg Thrasher
- **Restoring Dignity Song and Video:** Created by Eh Htoo Gay
- **Raise the Paddle :** Alex Pearson (Auctioneer)
- **Silent Auction Closes**



Special Guest



Katie Weitz

Katie Weitz, Ph.D. is a community activist who has been involved with Yates Illuminates and Restoring Dignity since 2020. The mission of Restoring Dignity resonates with Katie, who believes that something can and should be done to meet the needs of Omaha's community by working to attain racial equity through advocacy, partnerships, education, and empowerment. Katie has worked in philanthropy in Omaha since 2006 and serves on numerous boards including some that office at Yates Illuminates, such as the D2 Center. Katie enjoys hosting public health awareness events, getting out the vote, reading & drinking coffee with her husband, and traveling with her two children.

Angel Award Recipient



Greg and Nancy Thrasher

Greg and Nancy Thrasher grew up in small town Iowa. They married in 1976 and started Thrasher Inc. They have since added Supportworks and Hello Garage to their business portfolio. They have three children: Dan, Dave and Anna, all of whom work in their businesses. They love to spend time with their kids, their son-in-law and daughters-in-law, and their eight grandchildren. Nancy and Greg began supporting Restoring Dignity in 2016 and have remained faithfully involved ever since.



Founder's Story

Restoring Dignity was not something that began out of great ambition nor a desire to “save the world” or to find a meaningful cause. It was never something that started so we could win awards or be recognized. Restoring Dignity began with tragedy.

Rewind to July 2012. I was 24 years old and remember this time in my life vividly because a lot was going on. I had just switched careers, from being a medical social worker to a full-time, pre-medical student. I also had two little boys under the age of four who kept me busy when I wasn't studying. Life was going well until July 20th, 2012. What started out as a fun and joyous night at a local music hall, ended in tears and utter shock. A friend of mine saw me at the music event and informed me that a young woman I had mentored while I was a teenager had ended her life. Her name was Nyaduor. She was a beautiful and vivacious 18-year-old former South Sudanese refugee who had resettled to the United States as a child.

Nyaduor and I had met years prior at The Salvation Army. Her family had spent years in a Kenyan refugee camp before being allowed to come to Omaha, Nebraska, only to have suicide claim her father's life. I was 16 at the time and intimidated when I found out that my duty as a volunteer would be to help this family during their grief process. I didn't speak Nuer, didn't know anything about South Sudanese culture, and had no idea if anything I was saying or doing was correct. As I spent more time with the kids, my apprehension began melting away. The highlight of my week became the days when I'd pick up over a dozen youth and bring them to The Salvation Army for after school activities. In what seemed like no time, we transitioned from strangers, to friends, to family. I even started a mentoring class and many of the South Sudanese girls came, including Nyaduor.

For a four-year period, my parents and I volunteered together weekly (sometimes two or three times a week) with the South Sudanese youth. It was a fulfilling time that came to an end after I gave birth to my first son. After Elias' birth, I could no longer commit time to volunteering, and regrettably lost contact with many of the families and youth that had been part of my life for a long time. Fast forward two more years and my second son, Ezekiel, was born, capturing more of my time. Then another two years passed, and on July 20th, 2012, I found out about Nyaduor's passing.

In utter and complete shock, my mother and I went over to Nyaduor's home and sat with her family, grieving and helping them plan the funeral. A week went by, the funeral happened, and we continued to visit Nyaduor's family in their home. The more time I spent in her home during and after the funeral, the more I saw the pervasive bleeding wound of poverty. There were no sheets on any of the beds, the family shared two towels, there were only two working light bulbs in the house, and the carpet desperately needed cleaning. As a widowed refugee mother of five children, what little income she received was spent on their most immediate needs – there was no money left over for house repairs or home items.

One night, after leaving Nyaduor's house, I told my mother that I wanted to help her family in whatever capacity possible. We had just bought a carpet cleaner, and I remember saying, "I am going to clean their carpet. It's not much, but it's something." Another night of brainstorming with the family's cousin, Sunday, and we came up with the idea to publish a list of items that the family needed on a free blog. All we wanted was to restore some hope and dignity to this family's life – to give them a healing environment where they could grieve and not have to worry about the little things - sharing two towels, having to take a lightbulb from one room to the next, or having to sleep on a mattress with no sheets. It was the least we could do for them. We asked the family if it was alright if we did this, and the mother enthusiastically agreed.

So that's what we did. We created an event on a free blog, called it "Restoring Dignity," and asked our friends and family to help. The response was phenomenal! We received twice as many donations as we requested and dozens of people showed up to volunteer.



Pictures from the first Restoring Dignity home makeover (August 2012)

Over the course of two weekends, we completed a total "home makeover" for the family. Their entire home was now fully stocked, repairs had been made, everyone was sleeping on a bed with sheets, and each light fixture had a working lightbulb. All I remember about that night was that Nyaduor's family couldn't stop smiling as we walked them into their new home environment.

Continues on next page

Packing up all the excess furniture into minivans and unloading it into my parent's garage, we wondered what we were going to do with all the extra items that had been donated. The answer came shortly after, as Nyaduor's mother told us about another widowed South Sudanese refugee who was living in poverty and needed assistance. And thus another "Restoring Dignity" event was created on the blog. After we helped that family, a refugee caseworker reached out and asked if we could help a Karen refugee family of seven whose father was nearing the end of his long battle with cancer. So another event was created on the blog. With each completed project, another struggling family was brought to our attention.

More than 11 years later, we have completed 41 home makeovers and thousands of people have volunteered with Restoring Dignity. What began as a one-time event to assist one family has turned into a grassroots non-profit that serves thousands of refugees per year. Along the way, we discovered common issues that were solved by creating and delivering educational classes. Since obtaining our 501(c)3 status in 2019, our programs have impacted the lives of over 21,000 former refugees! Last year, we partnered with The Furniture Project and created Omaha's first furniture bank: an 18,000-square-foot warehouse that now furnishes close to 1,000 households per year.

Thinking about how Restoring Dignity has grown and has touched the lives of so many is emotionally overwhelming. In my heart, I am incredibly happy to see that so many people want to help others in our community. And yet, in the quieter moments of my life, I think back to Nyaduor: her smile, her wittiness, listening to hip hop, eating pizza rolls with hot sauce, taking silly pictures and having fun at summer camps. Restoring Dignity is my response to losing someone who made a significant impact on my life. It has also been my awakening to people who have been through horrific tragedy and loss – seeing unconscionable living conditions and finding a way to make things better.

In memory of Nyaduor,

Hannah Vlach



Nyaduor (center) and her cousin, Sunday (left)



THRASHER[®]

FOUNDATION REPAIR

Proud to Support Restoring Dignity



YOUR TRUSTED EXPERTS IN:

- ✓ Foundation Repair
- ✓ Basement Waterproofing
- ✓ Concrete Repair
- ✓ Crawl Space Repair
- ✓ Gutter Solutions

800-827-0702 | GoThrasher.com



About Restoring Dignity

**RESTORING
DIGNITY**

At the **heart** of Restoring Dignity is our belief that something can and should be done to meet the needs of Omaha's refugee community through empowerment, education, and advocacy partnerships.

OUR ORGANIZATION

- Started in 2012 by volunteers, first staff hired in 2018
- Incorporated in 2018
- 501(c)3 status in 2019
- Grassroots structure
- 72% of staff are former refugees
- 6 full-time staff , 9 part-time staff, 3 interns
- Over 21,000 refugees served since 2018





GRACE

homes

Discover your forever home.



Natalie & Eric Petersen

PROUDLY SUPPORT RESTORING DIGNITY



MOVE-IN READY



IMAGINE YOURSELF IN THIS PICTURE PERFECT APARTMENT

- 1 BED / 1 BATH
- NORTH FACING VIEW
- PATIO
- W/D IN UNIT
- 615 SQFT

SCHEDULE A TOUR TODAY!

(402) 280-8786 | Info@TheAtlasOmaha.com





Restoring Dignity Programs



WELCOME HOME PROGRAM

We acclimate resettled refugees by teaching comprehensive, in-home cleaning, food storage, and home & fire safety education classes. Families learn how to maintain a safe and healthy home environment. Classes are taught in the native language of the family by former refugees. Over 7,000 people have been impacted by this program since 2018.

FURNITURE BANK

Anyone who comes to America as a refugee can visit Omaha's furniture bank and take home furniture and household items at no cost. Each week, refugee families visit the furniture bank and "shop" for items. Since its original inception as a community donation center in 2018, close to 6,000 former refugees have obtained furniture and household items.

WINDOW A/C PROGRAM

Omaha gets HOT in the summer! Heat indexes of 95 degrees or higher are common. We provide and install window A/C units at no cost to any family who needs relief from the heat and has come to America with refugee status. All window A/C units are donated by community members. Several hundred units have been installed in refugee family homes since 2018.

HOME MAKEOVERS

Our organization started in 2012 with a home makeover for a South Sudanese family who experienced unimaginable loss. Since then, we have completed home makeovers for 41 families and counting! These events bring together large swaths of volunteers who transform a family's home over the course of one day.

HOUSING ADVOCACY

We believe safe and healthy housing is a human right. Families come to us for help involving communication with their landlord, getting repairs made, and resolving move-out charge disputes. We have worked with hundreds of families since 2018 and have established open lines of communication with landlords who predominantly have refugees as tenants.

RELIEF SERVICES

When crisis hits, our team is able to respond quickly and efficiently. We work regularly with the Douglas County Health Department and the Department of Health and Human Services, to get crisis messaging and emergency services to refugee communities:

- Dozens of mobile vaccine clinics with interpreters on-site
- Over 300 videos, in 14 languages, were produced regarding Covid-19 (over a quarter of a million views on social media platforms)
- We are the emergency language messaging provider for Douglas County
- Tens of thousands of items distributed during Covid (diapers, masks, etc).

HF

HEIDER FAMILY
FOUNDATION



ANTONY
REAL ESTATE, LLC

A TRADITION OF TRUST

Burlington Capital is an alternative investment management firm that creates and pursues innovative business ventures through its experience, knowledge and relationships in the areas of real estate, international agribusiness and private equity.

Burlington
CAPITAL

Visit our website at
BurlingtonCapital.com

Proud to
support
Restoring
Dignity

HONORING OUR COMMUNITY



RACE, RELIGION & SOCIAL JUSTICE CONFERENCE
2023 Building Bridges of Hope



UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT OMAHA
RELIGIOUS STUDIES



June 7-8, 2023

Tri-Faith Commons

OPENING KEYNOTE:
"AN EVENING WITH CLINT SMITH"
WEDNESDAY, JUNE 7 AT 7 PM

SCAN THE QR CODE TO REGISTER!



OR VISIT TRIFAITH.ORG/RRSJ-2023

Leading the
way we power
the future

Your Energy Partner[®]
OPPD
Omaha Public Power District



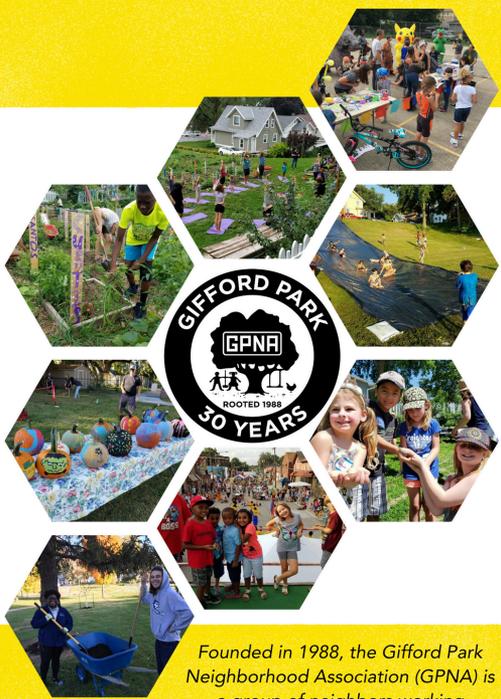
Together, we can do more.

Proud supporter of Restoring Dignity and their mission to meet the needs of Omaha's refugee community through empowerment, education and advocacy.

Visit www.american.bank to learn more.



Member FDIC

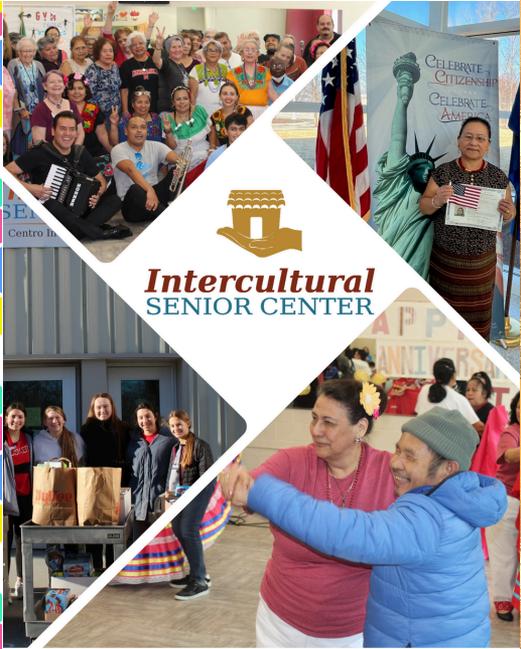


Founded in 1988, the Gifford Park Neighborhood Association (GPNA) is a group of neighbors working together to improve our community.

YATES ILLUMINATES

WE SERVE OUR COMMUNITY BY OFFERING SOCIAL, CULTURAL, AND EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES IN ORDER TO CREATE AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT THAT UPLIFTS EVERY PERSON'S POSSIBILITIES.

WWW.YATESILLUMINATES.ORG



Helping older adults (ages 50+) stay active and connected through our programs and services.

www.interculturalseniorcenter.org



Special Thanks

**RESTORING
DIGNITY**

To the in-kind donors who made this night possible:

Atlas Apartments -- donated parking lot

Champions Run -- donated silent auction items

Deb Munro & The Interior Design Firm -- gifting professional layouts

Fat Brain Toys -- donated silent auction items

Gifford Park Neighborhood Association -- donated community room at Yates

Henry Doorly Zoo -- donated silent auction items

Intercultural Senior Center -- donated shuttle van

Life Time Fitness -- donated silent auction items

Lululemon Village Point -- donated silent auction items

Natalie and Eric Petersen -- donated silent auction items

Smarty Plants -- donated flowers and foliage for event

Strategic Air Command and Aerospace Museum -- donated silent auction items

The Rose Theater -- donated silent auction items

Yates Illuminates -- donated space to host gala





Our Volunteers

RESTORING
DIGNITY

"The world is hugged by the faithful arms of volunteers."

-Terri Guillemets

- Rebecca Armstrong Langle
- Mike Burns
- Karen Burns
- Missy Collins
- Tim Collins
- Claudia Deeb
- Jessica Donovan Turner
- Renee Garcia
- Dan Gelster
- Dave Glover
- Ann Harms
- Steve Herrley
- Ree Htay
- Kaw Htoo
- Alisha Huynh
- Kathleen Kersey
- Hsa Klei
- Becky Landolt
- Steve Landolt
- Kelsey Le
- Linda Leary
- Jean LeBlanc
- Renee McArthur
- Timothy McCormick
- Cory Nelson
- Kristin Nelson
- Richard Perez
- Sole Salas
- Marcia Shadle Cusic
- Linda Shadoin
- Arlis Smidt
- Catherine Shipp
- Jennifer Sorensen Nelson
- Jamie Sweet
- Paw Thblay
- Katherine Turner
- Tam Webb
- Ning Zar





Staff & Board of Directors

**RESTORING
DIGNITY**

Staff

Hannah Vlach
Founder and Executive Director

Paw Bway Htoo
Welcome Home Program Director

Chloe Ray
Director of Operations

Eh Htoo Gay
Warehouse Manager

Chit Thel Oo
Family Educator

Eh KaLu Htoo
Warehouse Assistant

Bridget Perry
Volunteer Coordinator

Htoo Shee
Warehouse Assistant

Kmaw Klay
Warehouse Assistant

Emily Monzu
*Creighton University
Communications Intern*

Ester Paw
Family Educator

Sumiran Diyali Kochari
Family Educator

Jacques Musavyimana
Housing Advocate

Hadeel Haider
Family Educator

Lulu Bakyaw
Family Educator

Pu Meh
Family Educator

Grace Litzau
*Creighton University
Social Work Practicum Student*

Nay Mu
*Metropolitan Community College
Student Intern*

Board of Directors

Mary Blaney, CPA
President and Treasurer

Pamela Finn
Vice President

Leah Sawyer Baker, LCSW
Secretary

Abdi Hussein
Voting Member

Cory Nelson
Voting Member





Special Thank yous



- **Liz Hagestad:** for saying "yes" when asked to plan our first gala! Your bravery, ingenuity and enthusiasm made tonight possible. We literally would not be sitting here if it wasn't for you ❤️
- **Natalie Petersen:** for your incredible guidance and advice in the planning of this gala.
- **The Furniture Project:** partnering together at the furniture bank warehouse has been the honor of our lives. We are incredibly thankful that our stars aligned with yours .
- **Chris Foster:** Your grace, authenticity and willingness to show up when hard work is needed have inspired us. Thank you for being a tireless advocate for Yates and the surrounding neighborhood.
- **Katie Weitz:** When everyone else thought saving Yates was going to be a "no," you stepped up and allowed it to be a "yes." We are eternally grateful for your spirit, compassion, and vision of what this space can and will be.
- **Restoring Dignity Board:** For believing in us when we said we wanted to do a first time gala. "Where there's a will, there's a way." Thank you for your continued and unrelenting belief in the Restoring Dignity team and our volunteers.
- **Restoring Dignity Staff:** Your willingness to see the impossible and find ways to overcome it is inspiring. Each of you believes so strongly in what we are doing, and you give your all in everything that you do. No mountain is too high, no ocean is too deep. Every challenge is met with enthusiasm. There is no limit to what we can do.
- **Restoring Dignity Volunteers:** Anyone who has lost faith in humanity needs to come hang around all of you wonderful people! We have the best volunteers in the world, hands down. Thank you for giving your time and talent to furthering our mission!
- **Creighton University Business Students:** Ashley Homecgoj, Kate Lahsin, and Max Meekin. Thank you for dedicating your time to the technology behind the gala. We could not have done this without you!
- **Nancy and Greg Thrasher:** You believed in us first and we have our wings because of you!

Welcome Home



In honor of the families we serve, our warehouse manager, Eh Htoo Gay, wrote a song called, "Welcome Home." It will debut during tonight's program. To listen to the song on Spotify, search "Eh2" and look for the song "Welcome Home."

You don't have to go
You have to run no more
You don't have to go
This is your home

Welcome back home
You've been through enough
Now take it easy
I know it's been a rough ride for you
All of the pain you have been through
It's like a new point of view
No matter what you've been through
Just know that someone's with you
I know that the war is cruel
All of the fire and fuel
The children starving at night
The soldiers dying on sight
I know it hasn't been right
through the storm, welcome home

Wipe away your tears
You belong right here
You've been through hell and back
Facing all your fears
I know you've been facing the wars
The memories are proof of your battle scars
You've been through the thick and the thin
You've been through the dirt and the dust
Now you're home
Remember all your folks
Don't you ever give up hope
It's time for better days
Now the danger's gone away

All the rain and all the pain
There's always a better day
Have to keep your head straight

It's gonna be worth the wait
Circumstances not the best
All the pressure on your chest
I know life is such a mess
You will soon get a rest

I can start all over
I don't have to run
Take the weights off my shoulders
I will live my life
New life in the city
Alienated feeling heavy
All the traumas that I carry
Sometimes they still haunt me
I do what I hoped
I smiled at the shows
I keep on moving the way that I should
Write down my plans
Set on my path
Going forward, never looking back

Welcome back home
You've been through enough
Now take it easy
I know it's been a rough ride for you
All of the pain you have been through
It's like a new point of view
No matter what you've been through
Just know that someone's with you
I know that the war is cruel
All of the fire and fuel
The children starving at night
The soldiers dying on sight
I know it hasn't been right
through the storm, welcome home.

RESTORING DIGNITY



3260 DAVENPORT STREET
OMAHA, NE, 68131
RDOMAHA.ORG
INFO@RDOMAHA.ORG
402-370-9777

We apologize for any inadvertent errors or omissions in this program, as we sincerely appreciate everyone's support of our first gala and Restoring Dignity's mission.