



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on February 6, 2024

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## The Goodness of America

### Community Comes to Aid of Caring Business Owners

Husband and wife Edgar Rico and Sara Mardanbigi are the proud owners of the Austin, Texas, restaurant Nixta Taqueria, the pilot location for the area's first "community fridge." Edgar and Sara regularly replenished the fridge with fresh meals and "hydration packs" during heatwaves, and garnered a reputation for their generosity. When the community learned that the restaurant's power was disconnected due to an electricity-use issue, they stepped in to help.

When Edgar and Sara were forced to shut down operations in August 2023, they worried they could not help people in the community who had come to rely on them. They had managed to stay afloat when Covid struck just five months after they opened, and had continued to keep the community fridge stocked. One year after that, the Texas freeze shut down power at Nixta for two weeks, but the couple continued to feed thousands of people using propane tanks to power their store.

Edgar and Sara knew the electrical issue in August was going to take months to correct and cost money they simply did not have, so they decided to create a GoFundMe page with an \$80,000 goal.

"On August 16th, our electricity was abruptly disconnected from the majority of our building due to higher-than-usual amp usage (no surprise, considering we've had the hottest summer on record and every business is running way more power). We were told it was going to be an easy-ish fix, but it has now escalated to a place we could have never imagined," the couple explained on the fundraising page.

"The City of Austin is now requiring us to immediately halt the majority of our operations and do a full site plan before resuming operations. What is generally a 24-hour repair that would have cost around \$10k has now ballooned to a 3-6 month project that will require upwards of \$100,000, the displacement of our team, and a shell of what our restaurant operations are," they opined on the page. "An AC unit was installed in 2018 before we took over the lease, and that's what triggered the discussion of re-permitting. This is classic bureaucracy and red-tape. We're still reeling."

Within just two days of creating the page, they surpassed their goal. By late January, they had raised more than \$114,000.

According to the GoFundMe page, the funds were used to keep the employees on the payroll and to pay permit expenses, structural engineering expenses, mechanical and electrical expenses, architect expenses, and other costs.

Donors left kind messages for the couple, thanking them for their generosity in their community.

"Y'all fed us when we were frozen," donor Dan Reade wrote on GoFundMe. "You figured out how to make curbside happen when people were sick. You feed the community with the fridge and pantry. You lift other area chefs up and help grow other businesses along the way. It's the least that we could do when ya'll already do so much. Thank you!"

Another donor wrote, "In addition to the extraordinary and creative cooking you provide every day as a gift to ATX, ya'll were here for all of us throughout the pandemic. This is the least we can do in return."

Nixta Taqueria is back up and running with limited capacity as the restaurant continues to undergo construction, and Edgar and Sara report that they were able to continue to pay their workers



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throughout the ordeal.

“You see yourself in the community, when you see them show up back for you,” Nixta Taqueria assistant general manager Michael Gonzalez told CBS Austin.

Sara told GoFundMe, “It’s the best feeling in the world when you can tell people have your back.”

## **The Rescue Mafia**

When a winter storm hit Monmouth and Independence in Oregon in the middle of January, Caleb Cradit came to the aid of strangers stranded by the snow.

Cradit had headed out to a grocery store in his four-wheel-drive GMC Sierra on January 13 to pick up a few items when he noticed three cars stuck in the snow and ice. He stopped to help before returning home. Once home, he realized that there were likely many others in need of assistance, so he posted on social media that he was available to help.

“I had so many replies within a half hour that I couldn’t keep up with all of them,” he told the *Statesman Journal*.

Cradit knew he could not help all of those people alone, so he recruited others with four-wheel-drive vehicles in the area, and The Rescue Mafia — comprised of Cradit, RJ Lewis, Brittany Radley, Wesley Peterson, Cody Smith, Andrew Harris, and Tristan Barger — was formed.

“It’s nice to meet people who are like-minded like you and friends come out of nowhere sometimes,” Peterson said.

Over the course of the next few days, The Rescue Mafia helped approximately 300 people who needed rides to work, groceries, and help with cars that were stuck in the snow.

Peterson recalled helping one man carrying a 50-pound bag of dog food home in the snow by giving him a ride. Lewis recalled purchasing and delivering groceries for a woman and her son who were stuck at home. Barger said he used his Chevrolet pickup and a tow rope to tip a car back on its wheels after it rolled over on a back road.

Cradit said The Rescue Mafia did not ask for money in return for their good deeds, except to cover gas when a ride was needed outside of the Monmouth/Independence area. Some people chose to send them money, while others repaid their kindness with baked goods.

“The amount of support we got on there, it helped phenomenally to help with some of the fuel out of our pocket to do this,” he said.

Members of The Rescue Mafia did not know one another before they met up for the first time on January 18. After seeing so much need in their community, they have no intention of stopping.

“We’ve got the police department waving at us driving down the street,” Cradit said. “This has turned into something way bigger than I could have imagined.”



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