

# CHARITABLE CHORE

BY REUBEN M. SCHAFIR 1/24/2025

HERALD STAFF WRITER

At the end of a long row of rotating dryers, Neysha Candelaria stuffs her own laundry into several machines as she talks above the droning din in the room.



She gestures to a volunteer from St. Mark's Episcopal Church, who comes over and feeds quarters into the machines Candelaria has filled.

"This helps out so much," Candelaria said.

Nearly every machine in the North Main Laundry is spinning. People hurriedly fold their clothes and blankets atop bare metal tables and cart their belongings from washers to dryers in wheeled baskets.

**Carter Hampton,  
coordinator for Laundry**

***Love, talks with Neysha Candelaria and her son Andres Martinez, 16, on Wednesday during the Laundry Love event at North Main Laundry. Neighbors in Need Interfaith Alliance has partnered with Neighbors in Need Alliance and Manna soup kitchen to staff and support the program. The groups provide coins and assistance for low- or no-income families and individuals to wash their clothes and bedding.***

**JERRY MCBRIDE/ Durango Herald photos**

Although doing laundry might be an uneventful activity, there was an event and cause to celebrate Wednesday. Laundry Love was washing its 1,000th load. The program is simple in concept – make doing laundry accessible for low- or no-income people – but fills an important niche in the network of services available in Durango.

When financial hardship strikes and families are forced to triage expenses, things like doing laundry can take a back seat to paying the bills to keep the roof overhead and buying food, said Candelaria's son, Andres Martinez, 16.

"We had to worry about how we're going to clean our clothes, how we're going to pay for food and bills at the same time," Martinez said.

Carter Hampton, a board member of the Neighbors in Need Alliance, coordinates the program in conjunction with the Neighbors in Need Interfaith Alliance and Manna. Durango's Laundry Love program is part of a national network that makes laundry services more accessible. There are about 290 Laundry Love programs nationally.

Every other Wednesday, one faith community sponsors the event, usually to the tune of about \$250. Volunteers show up with donated eco-friendly detergent sheets, ready to help the bearers of laundry.

Manna registers and tracks participants on behalf of the program, of which there have been over 130 individuals since Laundry Love launched in Durango last February.

It's a win-win situation, said Richard Dilworth, also a NINA board member and longtime advocate of Durango's houseless community, because the laundromat gets a significant amount of business and people can get a basic need met.

And, he added, it's an avenue for connection in the community.

For Diane Davis, Laundry Love is a blessing.

With a monthly income of just \$249 – Davis can't work because of debilitating arthritis, degenerative disc disease and scoliosis – hand-washing her clothes is the only option.

"It saves me from an achy back and achy knuckles, because whenever I have to scrub ..." she trailed off. "Hand-washing is very difficult." It's also a matter of dignity, Kimberly Barnard said. She has been intermittently homeless over the last several years and now uses the Laundry Love program and volunteers for it through the Vineyard Church.

By wearing clean clothes, people show a level self-care that can go a long way in making a positive impression. And that can be key when it comes to finding and keeping a job.

On Wednesday, celebrating nearly one year and 1,000 loads of laundry done, Hampton had a cheery disposition. "We've had no issues, and a lot of good friends and a lot of good stories," he said. "I don't lack for volunteers. ... They want to come back again and again. They got nothing to do but talk and communicate with each other while the laundry is twirling."

The program has plenty of volunteers, he said, and certainly sufficient patronage, although he is looking for donations and grant funding to expand the capacity.

Anyone who wants to use the Laundry Love program should sign up in advance at the Manna Resource Center, located at 1100 Avenida del Sol in Durango.

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**Lydia Knapp, 7, helps fold her family's clothes on Wednesday during the Laundry Love event at North Main Laundry.**

**JERRY MCBRIDE/** Durango Herald



**Tina Lam, a volunteer with Laundry Love, assists Diane Davis as she washes clothes on Wednesday during the Laundry Love event at North Main Laundry. The program is "a blessing," Davis said. JERRY MCBRIDE/ Durango Herald**