

Chaffee's Got Heart Community Spotlight: Pastor Tom Abbott, First Presbyterian Church

The Chaffee's Got Heart Committee is extremely proud of local businesses and individuals that have gone above and beyond by doing extraordinary things during these uncertain times.

From innovating ways to thrive despite trying circumstances to showering struggling members of our community with generosity to prioritizing the health and safety of our most vulnerable, these businesses and individuals, who have been nominated for this honor by fellow community members, have shown what it really means when we say: **Chaffee's Got HEART.**

Today, we sat down with **Pastor Tom Abbott of Salida's First Presbyterian Church** to find out how he tackled the challenge of keeping his parish connected during the pandemic.

How did COVID change things for you and the people you work with?

The biggest change at church involved getting our services online. We upgraded technology and learned to do a lot on Zoom to make this happen. Another way it changed things was financially. Since people weren't in the building as much, we were a little "out of sight, out of mind" in terms of donations.

On the flip side of that, we saw a huge increase in donations for all of our outreach ministries serving people in need, including the food pantry, SOS Emergency Assistance, and Stone Soup Café. There was a huge outpouring of generosity from the congregation and the community through donations to our LOVE fund, which helps fund all of these efforts.

And, through my role as president of the board for Chaffee County Hospitality, which manages the emergency winter shelters, we've also seen enormous generosity from the community to support that effort. It's been a huge blessing and fun to see that happen.



Why did you decide to go above & beyond to contribute to our community?

I'm actually not doing anything out of the normal. It's been a way of live for me to be engaged in the world around me and to figure out ways to address the needs that exist in the community. First Presbyterian has a long history in the community of being a place people can get help so being able to plug into that just a year and a half ago was a huge gift.

Where do you see examples of the idea that ‘Chaffee’s Got Heart’?

First, the generosity I’ve witnessed from the community to help feed the funds at the Church and also help with the winter shelters has really been astounding.

Second, the overall interest people have in providing housing for the homeless. There is an incredible desire in this community to make sure people aren’t outside in winter overnight and the way members of our community have supported this process financially and/or with their time has been a definite show of heart.

What’s your biggest takeaway from the past year?

That the people in this community are committed to making sure that everyone, that each of their neighbors get through this crisis. The fact that so many have been willing to give, to share their resources with others in this challenging time shows the real heart our town has.

Cool Tidbits:

When Pastor Abbott arrived in mid-2019, he quickly realized that housing was a difficult issue here. Within a couple days, he got involved in homeless issues and is now chairing the Chaffee County Hospitality, Inc effort. After that first year of having the men’s shelter at the Lighthouse and providing hotel help for women and families, Tom helped raise \$75000 to run separate shelters for men and women through April of 2020.

To donate to the General fund, please visit: <https://www.salidapresbyterian.org/give/> . To give directly to the LOVE fund, which helps community members in need, please send a check to 7 Poncha Blvd, Salida, CO 81201.

To support the shelter, please visit: <https://www.chaffeecountyhospitalityinc.org/>

To volunteer or bring a meal to the shelter, please email Pastor Abbott at: tom@salidapresbyterian.org.

Stories of Chaffee County individuals and businesses rising to the challenge abound.

We will be shining a light on those doing extraordinary things for the community throughout the upcoming months. Visit our websites ([Chaffee’s Got Heart](#) or [CCPH](#)) or follow us on [Facebook \(@COVID19ChaffeeCounty\)](#) to see more.

Know a potential candidate, or are you one yourself? Send nomination ideas to: health@chaffeecounty.org.