

- NINA MOINI:** A group of Minnesotans with ties to Venezuela is working to get aid to people facing an ongoing humanitarian emergency. It's been three weeks since back to back earthquakes struck the northern coast of the country. At least 4,500 people have died, and thousands are missing. Many more lost their homes and are staying at displacement sites where illnesses are common.
- To help with relief and rebuilding, her home country, Chief Soleil Ramirez is hosting a sold-out fundraiser tonight at her St. Paul restaurant, Crasqui. She's on the line now to talk about the event, which is called Taste of Hope, Venezuela. Thank you for being with us, Chef.
- SOLEIL RAMIREZ:** Thank you, Nina. Thank you for the opportunity.
- NINA MOINI:** Absolutely. Devastating things are happening-- a lot of destruction, a lot of it, unfortunately, we're hearing, in the state of La Guaira where you used to live. And I understand you have family and friends. I'm so sorry. How are you doing? What are you hearing?
- SOLEIL RAMIREZ:** Well, it's been a very complicated times. I always try to explain it like a pool of emotions, because, personally, I'm devastated. I'm sad. But at the same time, I'm angry. I feel guilty. It's so many emotions right now for all the Venezuelans. We are outside of the country, and we're trying to do everything we can to help the people still in Venezuela, and we really need all the help we can get them.
- NINA MOINI:** We're talking a lot today about different emergency management plans and things that are being deployed here in the state of Minnesota, with the wildfires up North. But what are you hearing about what recovery efforts and logistics and planning have been like in Venezuela regarding these earthquakes now some three weeks after it began?
- SOLEIL RAMIREZ:** Yeah. So the thing is, Venezuela was already in a very complicated situation. We are a very poor country with all the money and all the dictatorship we have for the last 27, 28 years. So Venezuela was already plotted. We already were in a very tough situation. And now adding the two earthquakes, I mean, it's billions.
- If I don't remember, a lot of groups are getting together to make a plan for rebuilding the state of La Guaira and the part of Caracas was affected the most is going around \$80 billion. And of course, Venezuela doesn't have that money. But also it's all the people we need to rebuild the country.
- And that is what us, Crasqui restaurant, and my other business, Arepa Bar, it's a partnership with Ecos de Venezuela because we have a plan for the long run. We cannot keep just talking about Venezuela right now because Venezuela will need us for at least three years.
- NINA MOINI:** There's a lot of just people on the ground who are making things happen and trying to get things organized, it sounds like. And you're right. People outside the country, like yourself, have been working for weeks to collect donations. Can you tell me about how that came together, what you've been able to collect so far?

SOLEIL Yeah. So the Venezuelan community in Minnesota is not very, very big. We are around 3,000 to 4,000

RAMIREZ: Venezuelans in Minnesota. And we just came together as friends. Two of my very good girlfriends and myself, we were just talking on the phone because we were very affected. Like in my part, I lost my home, a lot of people I really care about, and--

NINA MOINI: I'm so sorry.

SOLEIL They call me to tell me, like, hey, I'm sorry. I know your home is gone. Is your mom alive? That was the first

RAMIREZ: question. My mom is fine. Thank God she wasn't in the apartment at the time. But we just said, OK, what we're going to do? And I said, OK, let's just-- you know, all the desperation, we created that drive because we did have more points outside of the cities, but we were the only ones in the city because Crasqui is located in St. Paul.

So we just posted, and we-- it was amazing to see how many people came together. The drive was more than 600 boxes in just two days, and that didn't count all the diapers and all the cases of water. So I will say we have probably more than 1,000 items, and we already send all that to Florida in the first weekend.

And after that, we sat down, and we said, OK, what is the plan? Because we can just not do this and stop. So we created a committee in Ecos de Venezuela for the plan, for the relief, and also the rebuild of our country.

NINA MOINI: And tonight you're having this fundraiser at your restaurant. It is sold out. Congratulations on that. Tell us a little bit about what you're doing to prepare for that and what the event tonight will be like.

SOLEIL Yeah, so we're expecting 150 people. We're going to have myself as a chef representing and doing a tribute to La

RAMIREZ: Guaira, because that is where my apartment was. And also, six more chefs-- we will have three more Venezuelan chefs and then three American chefs. A very good friend of mine, they have always helped me a lot with-- I do fundraisers. Last year, we actually did eight fundraisers for eight different nonprofit organizations.

NINA MOINI: Wow.

SOLEIL We're collecting money for Latin community in Minnesota. So I have a little bit of experience doing fundraisers.

RAMIREZ: And this year, it's closer to my heart because it's for my country and my people. So we are going to have Latin music. We have two Venezuelan musicians. Well, three, sorry. We have a local DJ, Marisa Perez Vega, the rap. She's coming to rap and to DJ a little bit to close the event. We have a live auction, a silent auction, and we'll also-- if people couldn't make it because the tickets run out, they can see the event online. We're going to stream it too.

NINA MOINI: OK. How do you make sure, Soleil, that the proceeds go to the right place, go to the correct place?

SOLEIL Yeah, that is something a lot of people is very worried about. We actually-- because we are-- Ecos of Venezuela, it

RAMIREZ: was created with a lot of organizations, businesses, and Latino leaders here in Minnesota. We still have a lot of people in Venezuela on the ground. So we are not working with any international companies because a lot of those nonprofits or ORG are international. They need to connect directly with the government.

We are working with nonprofit organizations are on the ground in Venezuela. So that it's the safest way you can get. And a lot of people is raising funds for their families, their friends. So they are sending money directly to the families are very affected.

NINA MOINI: And so just before I let you go, Soleil, tonight, we mentioned this event is sold out. But you do have plans to continue raising awareness, having more events. Can you tell us a little bit about what you have planned moving forward?

SOLEIL RAMIREZ: Yes, absolutely. We also have a lot of partners are doing different types of fundraisers to help us out. So on Monday 27, our friend Molly in St. Bonifacius, she is doing a tribute to Venezuela, and she's raising funds for our GoFundMe too. We have a fundraiser, too, with a drag show, and the drag is going to be presented there is from Venezuela, Muña Canola. They are raising the funds for-- that is July 31.

Then we're going to have a walk in nature for Venezuelans, because the Venezuelans are here who lost a lot of people. We really need help with all the-- we are very hurt. So we want to bring community together to help us out, to get out of this ver bad situation.

And we're going to have a concert in September in La Doña Cerveceria. We have a lot of events coming up, different type of events. So if the people wants to a little bit more about what we are doing and more information, you can follow us at Ecos de Venezuela in Instagram. And we also have a website. It's ecosdevenezuela.org in the web. So we will post everything there. And also, we will need a lot of volunteers for the next events.

NINA MOINI: All right. Ecos de Venezuela. Thank you very much, Soleil.

SOLEIL RAMIREZ: Thank you, Nina.

NINA MOINI: Chef Soleil Ramirez is the owner of Crasqui restaurant.