



# Brown Bag Bistro Owners Erin and Chris Velloff Perform Compassionate Deed: Donate \$5,484 To Keay Family

by Catherine Crutcher, Digital Sales Consultant  
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ALTON - The Brown Bag Bistro, at 318 E. Broadway in Alton, performed an extremely generous deed in the month of December, donating half the profits of their *The Carey* sandwich, named for Carey Keay, co-owner of Joe K's Family Restaurant, in Alton.

The Brown Bag Bistro sold 810 Carey sandwiches from December 1-23, 2020, and raised an astounding \$5,484 to donate to the Keay family. Carey suffered from a brain aneurysm last year and had a long hospitalization in St. Louis. Brown Bag Bistro owners and mother-daughter team, Erin and Chris Velloff wanted to extend a helping hand with extensive hospital bills.



Erin and Chris issued these statements about the success of the Carey sandwich and subsequent donation:

“We personally didn't know the Keay family at all,” Erin Velloff said. “We saw all the posts on social media and the lime green #CareyKStrong sweatshirts around town. I joined the [Updates on Carey K page on Facebook](#) so I could stay informed on Carey's status. After I saw that a GoFundMe was set up for Carey to try to raise donations for medical costs, I told my mom that we should help the family in some way. We tossed around a few ideas, like paying for one of Joe K's food trucks or donating a certain percentage of our sales one day before we ultimately decided on developing a "Carey" sandwich.

“The sandwich was \$12 and \$6 from every sandwich was donated to the family. What really hit home for me was how close in age Mallory and Sophie, their children, are to my sister and me, and how close we also are to our own mother. My mom and I really just did what we would want someone to do for us if we were put in a similar situation.”

When asked how the sandwich came about and if they will bring it back in the future, Erin and Chris responded with the following:

“I reached out to Carey's sister, Christi, to see what the family thought of the idea and to get ideas as to what kind of sandwich Carey herself would want. We were told that Carey's favorite sandwich of ours is *The Ultimate Ham & Cheese*, hence why we chose to put *The Carey* on an inverted croissant and include turkey.

“We kind of just ran with those two ideas and developed *The Carey* after some trial and error. That's how most of our sandwiches are created! As of right now, we don't plan on bringing the sandwich back right away but we do hope to bring it back at least as a special in the future. We sold 810 Carey sandwiches from December 1-23, and also received monetary donations. We had a contest on December 1 amongst the Brown Bag Bistro staff; who could guess the total amount of Carey sandwiches we would sell? Let's just say, no one was even close!





“The sales of the sandwich far exceeded our expectations. We would go on 45 minutes-1-hour waits regularly because of the sandwich, but thankfully, most people were very understanding. We had a lot of schools and hospitals order *The Carey*; Alton Middle School ordered over 50 one day. The first week of December was a learning process. Typically, we get our food trucks every Tuesday and Friday. December 1 was on a Tuesday, and by Wednesday afternoon we were nearly out of turkey and croissants for the sandwich. We completely depleted the supply of croissants from our main food supplier by mid-December.”

On Tuesday morning, January 5, 2021, Erin and Chris met with Joe, Mallory, and Sophie at Joe K's restaurant to present the donation check.

“We bought one of those giant checks off Amazon so the family could keep it,” Erin and Chris said.

Carey Keay's sister, Christi Lindsay Gulash, spoke for the Keay family about the sandwich donation: “We are so appreciative of Brown Bag Bistro for coming up with this extremely successful fundraiser and to the Alton community for supporting the cause. The sandwich was absolutely delicious and I can't wait for my sister to be able to try one someday.”

On a very positive note, Carey Keay has been discharged from Mercy Hospital in St. Louis and has been admitted to an LTACH (long-term acute care hospital) to begin her rehabilitation so that she can return home.



[Dan Brannan also contributed to this story.](#)