

The True Meaning of Hospitality

Owners of a Quality Inn & Suites Opened Their Doors to a Community in Crisis

Nestled amid the mountains of western North Carolina, the [Quality Inn & Suites Hendersonville – Flat Rock](#) is more than just a hotel to Sunny and Reema Desai, the couple who own it — it's a cornerstone of the community. They've always prided themselves on treating guests and staff like family, and that commitment to true hospitality was put to the test like never before when Hurricane Helene struck the area one year ago this week. The devastating storm caused widespread damage, leaving many without homes, power, or water.

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"September 27," remembers Reema. "That's when Helene hit us, and we had no idea that this was going to be as devastating as it turned out to be."

"This magnitude of damage it has done — lots of people lose homes, and so many people died," adds her husband, Sunny. "We'd been blessed that we had power and water at the hotel. Praise the Lord, we have a big kitchen and good supplies of food."

Sunny and Reema counted those blessings and then opened their hotel's doors to those who needed it most.

"I didn't have anywhere to go. I had no power, no water," explains Choice Hotels Area Director Christy Williams, who lives in Asheville, about 25 miles from the Desais' Quality Inn & Suites. "I grabbed up my 84-year-old neighbor, and we hopped in the old Toyota, and we drove down here, where we were immediately welcomed."

Christy, who has worked with Sunny and Reema since they purchased the property in 2019, was among the first of many welcomed with open arms, a warm bed, and hot food by Sunny and Reema.

"We were a mixed bag of guests here," Christy says. "People who were without power and water, who were without homes, first responders and rescuers who had come from all over the United States to here... This was their home."

What the Desais did during Hurricane Helene brought new meaning to the word "hospitality" for the people they welcomed into their "home" in such a time of need, and it brought new meaning to the word "family" for Sunny.

"Most of the time we think of our family as only you and your wife and your kids, but when something happens like this, you think of other people around you as your family," he explains. "Nothing special about me."

We at Choice Hotels have to disagree with Sunny on that. We think he and Reema are very special indeed, and we couldn't be prouder to count them as two of the thousands of small business owners who own and operate a Choice property.