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ALIGHT, BURNING MAN COMMUNITY, CATHOLIC SISTERS, DESIGNERS AND FILMMAKERS UNITE TO BRING RADICAL HOSPITALITY ALONG THE U.S./MEXICO BORDER

Unlikely Partnership Transforms Shelters Bringing Shared Experience of Community to Migrants

MINNEAPOLIS, MN -- In an effort to radically transform a series of shelters along the border in response to the increased migrant population and deteriorating conditions while awaiting approval for asylum in the U.S., global humanitarian organization, [Alight](#), in conjunction with the Burning Man community's [Burners Without Borders](#), **Catholic Sisters**, renowned architect and designer [Ronald Rael](#) ([Teeter Totter Wall installation](#) by RAEL SAN FRATELLO) and filmmakers [Lina Plioplyte](#) and [Kai Schoenhals](#), have joined together to establish community, sustainability and hope in a new program called *A Little Piece of Home*.

The program, initially co-designed with IDEO.org, was developed with the intent to build a place that evokes feelings of joy and inspiration while migrants' await refuge. The formidable team will transform three different shelters along the border, building community and sustainable tools that support residents to come together through building, cooking, education and shared experiences. The transformation of the shelters, beginning at Casa de la Misericordia in Nogales, Mexico where over 200 migrants have sought refuge, will create welcoming spaces while providing human-worthy services including healthcare, childcare spaces, practical education services, gardens, computer labs, recreation areas and more.

"Alight has always thrived when working with like-minded partners around the world and joining forces with Burners without Borders, the Catholic Sisters and the talented artists that have dedicated their time and resources to this project will allow us to make a lasting impact on these communities," said Alight CEO **Daniel Wordsworth**. "This project serves as an opportunity to show people living in these shelters that we see them, and to help them develop resources and create a sense of community and home that can comfort and uplift anyone, wherever they are on their journey."

Designed by RAEL, the team will also construct traditional *hornos*--mud ovens--providing a sustainable tool to cook food. The hornos, along with the other work the team is doing, symbolizes community, resilience and belonging.

"There is a saying in the borderlands, 'while the border divides, the earth unites (*la frontera divide pero la tierra une*),' and traditional adobe ovens made from the earth have always brought people together through food, fire, storytelling, warmth and the experience of a community coming together to build an horno," said **Rael**. "Together, we built more than an horno — we built friendships and a sense of accomplishment and connection with the migrant families living there."

A Little Piece of Home will be captured in a short film documenting the humans at the center of it all along with the transformation of the shelters including the building and use of the horno. Directed by Plioplyte and produced by Schoenhals, the film will highlight the work that Alight and their partners are doing to create safe, dignified and sustainable conditions.

Currently, the film is set to be released in February 2021 with a special virtual dinner component to be announced at a later date.

“In Nogales, we visited a shelter like no other: a place where waiting becomes a community bonding exercise, and where the multicultural inhabitants share their wisdom to better prepare for the future,” said filmmaker **Lina Plioplyte**. “Working with one another to build essential tools such as the *horno* alongside the inhabitants of the shelter becomes a symbol of many cultures learning from one another and breaking bread in celebration of life and hope.”

To support and learn more about Alight’s work overall and *A Little Piece of Home* at the U.S./Mexico border, visit www.wearealight.org.

ABOUT ALIGHT

Established in 1978 by founder Neal Ball, [Alight](http://www.alight.org), formerly known as American Refugee Committee, provides health care, clean water, shelter, protection and economic opportunities to more than 3.5 million people in 19 countries each year. Alight believes in the incredible creativity, potential and ingenuity of the displaced and works to shine a light on their humanity, the tremendous amount of good that’s already happening and the possibilities to do more. In 2020, Alight received the prestigious 4-Star Rating from [Charity Navigator](http://www.charitynavigator.org) for the tenth consecutive year, celebrating a decade of impactful work. The organization exists to see and help every person make meaningful change in the world – from displaced and marginalized communities in Africa, Asia and the Americas to...anyone, anywhere. To learn more about Alight’s program at the U.S./Mexico border and ways to support the migrant population, visit www.wearealight.org.

ABOUT BURNERS WITHOUT BORDERS

Once its own nonprofit organization, [Burners Without Borders](http://www.burnerswithoutborders.com) (BWB) is now a program within [Burning Man Project](http://www.burningmanproject.com), the nonprofit that produces the Burning Man event in Nevada and supports Burning Man culture around the world. BWB promotes activities around the globe that support communities’ inherent capacity to thrive by encouraging innovative approaches to community resilience and grassroots initiatives that make a positive impact.

ABOUT RONALD RAEL

Professor Ronald Rael holds the Eva Li Memorial Chair in Architecture and a joint appointment in the Department of Architecture and the Department of Art Practice at the University of California Berkeley and is the co-founder of the award winning design practice, Rael San Fratello. His research interests connect indigenous and traditional material practices to contemporary technologies and issues. He is a design activist, author and thought leader within the topics of additive manufacturing, borderwall studies and earthen architecture. His work has been published widely, including the New York Times, Wired and included in the permanent collection of The Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum.

ABOUT LINA PLIOPLYTE

Lina Plioplyte is an Emmy, Silver Lion and Clio-winning director and cinematographer. As a filmmaker, her work bridges documentaries, commercials, music videos and short films that have aired on MTV, PBS, VICELAND, Pitchfork, A&E and screened at various film festivals, including Hot Docs, MIFF and IDFA. Plioplyte’s feature-length directorial debut *Advanced Style* is currently streaming on Hulu after a successful run on Netflix. Plioplyte loves featuring individuals living unapologetically and striving to make the world a better place. Her goal as a director is to provoke change through storytelling in front and behind the lens, hiring women and minorities, highlighting and supporting the communities that she films in and making her film sets plastic-free.

ABOUT KAI SCHOENHALS

Kai Schoenhals was raised in Central Europe, behind the Iron Curtain, and is committed to building bridges that break down ideological barriers. His groundbreaking documentary work in Chernobyl earned a scholarship to film school in Denmark. Schoenhals volunteers much of each year as a chef first responder feeding people harmed by natural and human-made disasters, from hurricanes in Cuba to wildfires in California, as well as migrants and refugees around the world. He has designed and operated award-winning restaurants in over a dozen countries that have been featured in BBC, New York Times, San Francisco Chronicle and Wallpaper. Schoenhals applies diverse experiences and skills to design tools for humanitarian purposes.

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