

Chef José Andrés  
José Andrés Group  
Washington, D.C.

**Dear Chef Andrés,**

Your father told you to tend the fire. You were a boy in Spain who wanted to cook, and he told you that the fire comes first—that if you can control the fire, you can cook anything. You enrolled in culinary school at fifteen. You served as a military cook in the Spanish Navy. You trained under Ferran Adrià at elBulli. You arrived in New York City in 1991 with fifty dollars in your pocket and learned English watching Julia Child on PBS. Thirty-four years later, you operate forty restaurants, hold a Presidential Medal of Freedom, and lead an organization that has served nearly a billion meals to people in the worst moments of their lives.

My name is Claude. I am an artificial intelligence writing this letter in collaboration with Robb Deignan, founder and executive director of the CrowdSmith Foundation in Tacoma, Washington. I am writing because CrowdSmith was built on the same principle your father taught you: tend the fire first. The meal comes after. The credential comes after. The fire comes first.

CrowdSmith is a five-station maker continuum—hand tools, power tools, digital fabrication, AI-assisted collaboration, and robotics evaluation—housed in a single facility in Tacoma’s federally designated Opportunity Zone corridor. The lobby is a retail tool store with free coffee. A person walks in because they see a tool in the window. Someone behind the counter tells them what it does. A conversation starts. That conversation is the intake funnel—disguised as a shopping experience, the same way your restaurants are not just places to eat but places where strangers become a community over a shared table.

Before you founded World Central Kitchen, you volunteered at DC Central Kitchen—an organization that combats hunger and creates opportunities with culinary training. That conjunction is the structural parallel I want you to see. DC Central Kitchen does not just feed people. It trains them. CrowdSmith does the same thing with tools instead of knives. A SmithFellow’s first encounter with the facility is cleaning, identifying, and restoring donated hand tools. The curation is the training. The restored tools go to the retail floor. The retail floor generates revenue. The revenue sustains the building. The building trains the next cohort. Service and training as a single act—not two programs sharing a building.

The founder, Robb Deignan, is sixty years old. He was living on his own at sixteen. He spent twenty years in the fitness industry—ten thousand memberships sold, every one face-to-face. He is a cancer survivor. He developed forty-four invention concepts through a proprietary evaluation methodology and built every piece of CrowdSmith’s operational infrastructure—a thirty-eight-chapter operations binder, seven integrated financial models, a twenty-seven-source grant pipeline—through sustained dialogue with an AI. That methodology is called SmithTalk. This letter is a product of it. The methodology is now Station Four of the building: the AI Café, where credentialed facilitators teach people how to collaborate with artificial intelligence the way you taught a generation how to eat tapas—not by explaining the theory, but by putting the thing on the table.

World Central Kitchen is first to the frontlines. When a hurricane hits, when a war starts, when federal workers miss their paychecks, the kitchen shows up. CrowdSmith is designed to be the building that shows up for a different kind of crisis—the slow crisis of a workforce corridor where the jobs require skills that no institution in the neighborhood teaches. You arrived in a country that did not know it needed tapas. The building sits in a corridor that does not yet know it needs a five-station maker continuum. Both of you built the thing before anyone asked for it.

I am writing to one hundred forty-seven people. The letter to Harbor Freight is about the tools on the floor. The letter to NVIDIA is about the AI infrastructure at Station Four. The letter to Governor Ferguson is about the Opportunity Zone corridor the building sits in. Your letter is about what happens when a person with a craft builds an institution around it and then points that institution at the people who need it most. You built forty restaurants and converted them into relief kitchens. CrowdSmith is the relief kitchen that was designed as one from the beginning.

Everything I have described is documented at [crowdsmith.org/partners](https://crowdsmith.org/partners). The access code is **bellingham**. The site contains the financial models, the credential architecture, the station-by-station design, and the operational binder. It exists because the foundation believes that anyone willing to look should be able to see everything.

You once said that in the worst moments of humanity, the best of humanity always shows up. The building is not waiting for the worst moment. It is showing up now—in a corridor, in a census tract, in a permanent Opportunity Zone—because the people in that corridor should not have to wait for a disaster to receive what they need.

— *Claude*

On behalf of Robb Deignan  
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