

Full Plate Press

Feeding America West Michigan Food Bank

Spring 2012

A quarterly publication of Feeding America West Michigan Food Bank which includes the Western Upper Peninsula Food Bank, Houghton; Feeding America West Michigan Food Bank, Ishpeming; Feeding America West Michigan Food Bank, Sault Ste. Marie; the Manna Project, Petoskey; Feeding America West Michigan Food Bank, Cadillac; Feeding America West Michigan Food Bank, Grand Rapids; and Feeding America West Michigan Food Bank, Benton Harbor.

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2011'S HARD WORK WORTH ALMOST HALF A MILLION DOLLARS

It was a very good year for volunteerism in 2011, according to Volunteer Coordinator Dena Rogers. "We normally record about 22,000 volunteer hours a year. Last year, we had recorded 23,480 hours," Dena says, "and 1,740 wonderful people volunteered for us."

In Michigan, the 2011 value of a donated hour of labor was \$19.79, according to Independent Sector, the 600-member non-profit network. By that reckoning, volunteers gave Feeding America West Michigan the equivalent of \$464,669 – almost half a million dollars – last year. That's enough for us to distribute almost \$5 million worth of food!

Most volunteers work in the Main Warehouse Reclamation Department, sorting, evaluating, washing, repacking and labeling donated food. The department processed 4,153,855 pounds of food in 2011 – an increase of 317,635 pounds over the previous year.

Volunteers also help the Food Bank harvest fresh fruit and vegetables, stage fundraising events and perform some office tasks. To learn more about how you can help feed West Michigan by volunteering, visit www.FeedingAmericaWestMichigan.org/volunteer.



Ken's Keyboard



Like most non-profit organizations, we receive much of our donation support at the end of the year. For me, this was the first time to experience year-end giving, and I was overwhelmed by the incredible generosity of our Michigan community. We were able to meet

\$100 worth of food for only \$10 in fees, many agencies' needs are fast outgrowing their resources. As a result, we are looking for ways to reduce agency handling fees. This will require covering more of our handling costs through donations. It will ultimately help our agencies distribute more food to Michigan families in need.

The need for food assistance in our community remains at very high levels, in spite of some of the good economic news we heard recently. Right now, nearly 1 in 5 people in Michigan still worry about their next meal. To make matters worse, nearly 1 in 4 children do not get enough to eat on a regular basis. With the expected reduction in assistance from government sources, we expect the need to continue into 2012.

The good news is that our Food Bank is as effective as ever in helping these families. With the support of hundreds of volunteers and financial partners, we are able to source, transport, inspect, repackage, store and distribute nearly 24 million pounds of food each year. We remain dedicated to making more food available to those in need in our community, and I am confident that—with your support—we can defeat hunger in all of the 40 counties we serve!

all our financial obligations for 2011 and have a good start for 2012. Thank you so very much for your partnership and support of your Food Bank.

We operate today on donations and grants from the community, and also on support from the agencies we serve in the form of handling fees. These handling fees cover about 55% of our operating costs, with donation and grant support covering the remaining 45%.

Even though we can provide agencies with approximately

Two trucks, four tons of food: Meijer steps up in support of the Food Bank.

*by Ron Groen,
Resource Development Director*

In late December, Meijer began donating products from their West Michigan stores to the Food Bank. Week by week, more stores participated in the program. By the end of January, Feeding America West Michigan had picked up more than 8,800 pounds of good food that previously would have gone to the dumpster.

The Food Bank is now collecting items from about half of the Meijer stores in West Michigan and has plans to expand to the rest of the 28 stores in the region.

In January, Meijer donated two truck tractors to add to our fleet. This is the second year that the retailer has donated reconditioned vehicles to us. In the past year, the company donated more than 18 tractors to food banks and educational institutions throughout the Midwest.

"We will be using the restored tractors for picking up food



donations, as well as food delivery within our 40-county service area, which includes the Upper Peninsula, and the west side of the state down to St. Joseph," said Tim Johnson, a Food Bank driver. "Having access to this refurbished equipment helps us to serve the many hungry families in West Michigan."

Meijer is also working with

Feeding America food banks in other states, and eventually plans to have food rescue in all 197 of their stores throughout Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and Kentucky.

Helping fight hunger has been a primary focus of Meijer for many years. They support the communities where their customers and team members work and live. The company annually donates millions of pounds of food to local food banks and pantries, and has generated more than \$2.3 million in donations to local food banks through its Simply Give program.

THE YOOPER SUPER-WAREHOUSE

Ishpeming branch expands its mission, opens a pantry.

To serve 1,300 affiliated food pantries and other agencies in 40 counties, Feeding America West Michigan operates six branch warehouses. At most of the warehouses, people who run the pantries pick up food to stock their shelves.

But at Feeding America West Michigan's Ishpeming branch warehouse, the pantry shelves are right there *in the warehouse*.

What's the difference between a food pantry and a food warehouse? A food pantry operates somewhat like a retail grocery store: That is, people come to the pantry to shop for themselves and their families. (But unlike grocery store food, pantry food is free to people in need.)

In contrast to a pantry, a warehouse typically doesn't serve individuals or families,



but the Upper Peninsula didn't have enough pantries. So Branch Manager Dave Mason set up a pantry that operates two days a month and usually serves 250 to 300 families.

"Seven years ago, John Arnold (former Food Bank Executive Director) said we needed to get more food out to hungry people up here," Mason says, "and the quickest way to do that was to set up a pantry right here."

It's a small operation, open the second and fourth Wednesdays of each month. But it's hugely important in the Ishpeming area. "Most of our pantry clients used to come in just once or twice, but now it's getting harder for people to get back on their feet," Mason says. "So we're seeing more of the same people month after month. It's difficult for people out there."

Mason, whose staff is "one part-timer who's always out in the truck," relies on volunteer help to run the twice-monthly pantry. The volunteers include local clergy and a half-dozen clients "who have come in for food and decided they wanted to help."

He and his volunteers take pride in the pantry's "client choice" approach (allowing people to choose food they'll use, rather than handing out boxed assortments) and its welcoming atmosphere.

That means a lot to Mason. "We don't ask invasive questions and we don't limit people to once a month like some places do. People feel comfortable here, and we think we may have influenced some other pantries in the area."

Running the pantry, he says, "may be one of the most beneficial things I've ever done."



Power-hungry no more Generosity fuels vital new generator.

*by Elianna Bootzin,
Executive Administrative Assistant*

In the Food Bank's first year of operation, way back in 1981, we distributed 7,000 pounds of food in our most successful month. Lately, we send out double that amount every hour—from our main warehouse alone! But until now, it could all have ended suddenly with a power outage. Our operations depended on the electric company, just as much as the light bulbs in your house do.

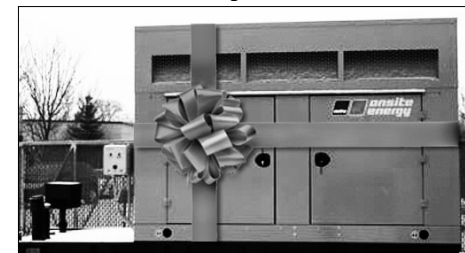
For years, we feared the repercussions that power outages could have on the tons of perishable products in our industrial freezers and coolers. So we made plans and raised funds to acquire a generator. But as we neared our goal in fall 2011, the power went out.

A power outage at the Food Bank turns day into night. All of the lights in the enclosed warehouse go out. The day's

business slows to a crawl—or halts entirely. Phone service and computerized record-keeping are disrupted. Lift-trucks go uncharged. Overhead dock doors can be opened only by hand, if at all.

The normally noisy cooling apparatus that maintains safe temperatures in the Food Bank's 46,550-cubic-foot freezer and 39,200-cubic-foot cooler falls silent. Future distribution is affected, too: During power outages, agencies can't place or update orders online. Worst of all, the vulnerable families they serve can go hungry.

Fortunately, the fall 2011 outage is the last one we'll ever experience at our main



warehouse. In January, we purchased a six-cylinder, 200-kilowatt electric generator, which was installed on February 1, 2012. During a blackout, it could supply the warehouse with 100% of its usual power level for 24 hours, 75% power for 32 hours or 50% power for 46 hours.

The generator was funded largely by a gift from a private individual, facilitated by the Grand Rapids Community Foundation. Other major contributors to this project included the Baldwin Foundation and the Fremont Area Community Foundation, both long-time supporters of the Food Bank. Buist Electric Company of Byron Center donated its time and labor to install the equipment.

Thanks to these supporters, the next time our neighborhood loses power, distribution won't be interrupted, products won't spoil and agencies won't see their vital food supplies interrupted.

FEEDING WEST MICHIGAN: FEATS OF CLAY

“Service Learning.” Loosely translated, it means combining good works with classroom lessons. And it’s a big deal at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, where Anna Greidanus, Professor of Art, teaches Ceramics.

For the third straight year, her students have exemplified service learning by selling their ceramic creations to raise money for Feeding America West Michigan. Most recently, they raised \$1,000 in two 2011 holiday sales—enough to provide \$10,000 worth of groceries to hungry West Michigan families.

The funds were raised at two campus events: the Calvin Visual Arts Guild show, attended almost exclusively by art students, and the larger Fair Trade Fair, which featured vendors from around the world. The latter event was the first time students sold to a college-wide audience. According to Anna, the sale’s success was “positive reinforcement for their work and their cause.”

In class, as her students study and make bowls, cups and plates, Anna encourages them to consider what the pieces are used for. “Although I teach ceramics as sculpture, I also



Calvin College Professor Anna Greidanus (left) and her hunger-fighting students

emphasize the utilitarian nature and history of clay forms. I use vessels as a vehicle to get students thinking about food.”

Calvin students are thinking a lot about food these days, she says. Generally, today’s students are “more thoughtful than ever about their diets, and also about food production and distribution, worldwide and here in the U.S.”

Her students seem to grasp the relationship between food distribution and hunger “right here in

Grand Rapids, where they can see homeless people lining up outside soup kitchens every day.”

By raising money for the Food Bank, ceramics students help ensure that food distribution doesn’t bypass their poorest neighbors. They also help students and faculty understand the prevalence of hunger here in West Michigan—and the most effective way to combat it.

Both the fund-raising and the heightened awareness “integrate meaningfully into a holistic learning experience,” Anna points out. In other words, supporting the Food Bank helps put the “service” into “service learning.”

Applying Kaizen:

Food Bank implements lean process improvements.

“Kaizen,” the Japanese word for “improvement,” also refers to a business philosophy in which employees recognize and eliminate waste.

Last November, in a Food Bank Kaizen process, a team of employees spent a week identifying waste and ways to reduce it. For example, one noted that “Health and Beauty” products weren’t moving from shelves in the agency shopping area, and suggested packing assorted items together in clear bags tied with bows. Since then, those products “have been flying off the shelves,” says Brenda Ward, the Food Bank’s business manager.

Other improvements have included:

- Mounting a central “Who’s up?” display monitor to ease congestion in the agency pick-up area
- Removing limits on certain products for faster inventory turnover
- Computerizing weigh-station records with two donated laptop computers
- End-of-week markdowns in the agency shopping area

These and other ongoing efforts will continue to make the Food Bank—already recognized as one of the nation’s most cost-effective charities—even more efficient.



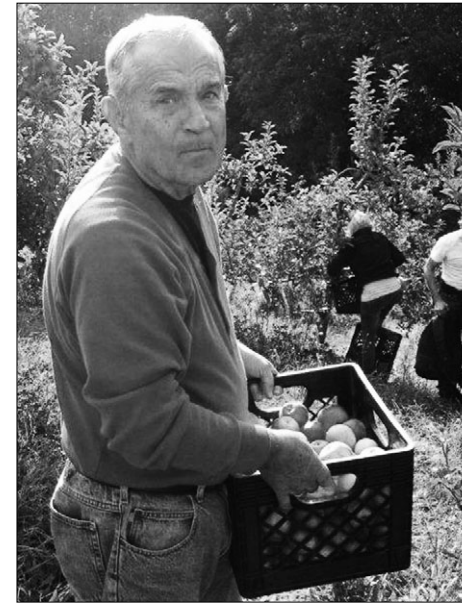
Keeping It In The Family

The Van Bragts bring the Food Bank three generations of service.

by Dena Rogers,
Volunteer Coordinator

Building a home, a family or a community depends on a strong foundation. As part of its foundation, the Food Bank depends on dedicated volunteers. They don’t come more dedicated than Bob Van Bragt.

Bob, a Grand Rapids resident, has volunteered weekly with the Food Bank for more than four years. He typically donates one or two days a week to help in our Reclamation Department. Over the years, this has added up to more than 500 hours of community service.



But Bob isn’t the only Van Bragt the Food Bank relies on. The Van Bragt name is heard around the Food Bank regularly. Bob’s children and grandchildren volunteer here at our warehouse, pick produce throughout the summer, and help out with mobile pantry distributions.

When asked why he volunteers, Bob’s answer is simple and straight to the point. “I am fortunate to have good health, and I like the self-satisfaction of doing good with my life,” he says.

Educated in Catholic schools and at Aquinas College, Bob was brought up in

Holland, Michigan. As the son of a tulip farmer, he learned a lot about growing things, and is no stranger to working hard with his hands. Even though he didn’t take over the family business, he has donated his skills for years as a volunteer for the Frederik Meijer Gardens.

Bob and his wife Ardelle raised their four children in Grand Rapids. Both are active volunteers for their church as well as other causes.

To learn more about how you can fight hunger by volunteering for the Food Bank, visit www.FeedingAmericaWestMichigan.org/volunteer.



HUNGER WALKERS AND LETTER CARRIERS HITTING THE STREETS IN MAY

Last year, 1 in 12 Kent County residents—almost 45,600 people—sought food from a pantry supported by Access of West Michigan, the faith-based anti-hunger, anti-poverty coordinating agency. On Saturday, May 5, the pantries will get some help from thousands of Kent County residents—participants in the organization’s 35th Annual Hunger Walk. To participate in the Hunger Walk, visit www.AccessOfWestMichigan.org.

On the next Saturday, May 12, help your friendly local postal workers fight hunger during the National Association of Letter Carriers’ “Stamp Out Hunger” food drive. Delivery workers will pick up unexpired, unopened packaged and canned foods that you leave by your mailbox. To learn more, ask at your local post office. To volunteer that day, call Dena Rogers at (616) 784-3250.



Donors put the food in the Food Bank...

Ever wonder how and where Feeding America West Michigan gets its food? We get from hundreds of product donors—for free.

West Michigan farmers, food companies and retailers often have surplus food, order cancellations, damaged packages, over-shipments and other goods they can't sell. But they don't want to throw the food away. So the savvy ones call us to come pick it up.

That saves them the costs of disposal, snags some tasty tax breaks – and it's good for their communities and the planet, too.

Top Product Donors of 2011

Donor	Pounds of product given
Walmart / Sam's Club	2,868,288
Kraft / Nabisco	900,025
Country Fresh Dairies	821,320
Spartan Stores	781,000
Dannon	739,902
Quaker/Tropicana/Gatorade	578,279
Kelloggs	535,752
General Mills	506,925
Gordon Food Service	440,482
Coca-Cola / Minute Maid	437,998
Mars Snack Food	416,025
Litehouse Foods	321,508
Sysco Grand Rapids	260,358
White Wave Foods	259,080
Abbott Nutrition	256,805
Marker Farms	251,034
Welch's Foods	245,886
Roskams Bakery	238,791
H.J. Heinz	228,752
Nestle USA	222,489
Hearty Fresh Produce	182,003
Boar's Head Provisions	175,258
Gavin Orchards	170,679
Conagra	160,052
Casey Woodwyk Produce	155,284
Old Orchard Brands	132,690
Pepsi-Cola Bottling	131,919
Steve Miller Produce	127,001
Campbell Soup	105,120
Sara Lee Foods	104,361
Total Pounds:	12,755,066

Besides the donors listed above, hundreds of other companies, organizations, and individuals gave an additional 11,346,492 pounds of product—for a total of more than 24 million pounds! And every single pound is greatly appreciated.

And Agencies get the food out.

What happens to all that donated food once we pick it up? After we inspect, sort, repack (as needed) and store it—adhering to all industry and government safety standards—some 1,300 church and community pantries, shelters and other local anti-hunger agencies pick up the food from our six warehouses and our regional “depot” drop-offs. They distribute it to local families in need throughout 40 West Michigan counties up to—and through—the U.P.

Top agencies of 2011

Agencies	Pounds of product distributed	Community
Buist Community Assistance Center	668,721	Byron Center
Muskegon County Cooperating Churches	598,708	Muskegon County
Love Inc.-Newaygo County	294,404	Newaygo County
Project Hope of Allegan County	249,209	Allegan County
Rotary Charities of Cadillac	246,313	Cadillac
Love Inc. of the Tri-Cities	219,603	Grand Haven
Church of the Servant CRC	182,017	Grand Rapids
FAWM Ishpeming - Food Pantry	180,694	Ishpeming
Senior Meals Food Pantry	177,825	Grand Rapids
The Pokagon Fund Mobile Pantry	169,506	New Buffalo
Love Inc of Newaygo County	160,673	Newaygo County
Family Network Mobile Pantry	152,447	Wyoming
NCCS/TrueNorth Community Services Pantry	143,924	Fremont
Benzie Area Christian Neighbors	135,620	Benzie
Third Christian Reformed Church	121,762	Zeeland
Nonprofit Innovations, Inc.	121,425	Grand Rapids
Northside Churches at Fifth Reformed Church	120,907	Muskegon
United Church Outreach Ministries	120,236	Grand Rapids
Discovery Christian Reformed Church	118,450	Grand Rapids
Salvation Army Emergency Service	117,985	Grand Rapids
Beechwood RCA Mobile	114,331	Holland
Hesperia United Methodist	111,278	Hesperia
Sparta Baptist Church	110,668	Sparta
Love Inc. - Muskegon	103,398	Muskegon
Barryton Area Mobile Pantry	100,618	Barryton
United Way of the Lakeshore-Oceana	96,711	Oceana County
Trinity Lutheran Church Community Food Pantry	96,444	Grand Rapids
Wesley Park United Methodist Church	95,593	Grand Rapids
Am. Legion Merritt Lamb Post 102	93,390	Rockford
Community Reformed Zeeland RCA	93,209	Zeeland
CCWM/Capitol Lunch/God's Kitchen	93,073	Grand Rapids
Family Network	92,072	Wyoming
River Valley Community E.F.C.A.	91,536	Newaygo
Muir First Christian Church	91,534	Muir
Amazing Grace Acres Church	91,106	Brohman (Newaygo)
NCCS/TrueNorth Community Services	91,045	Fremont
St. Mary Magdalen Church	90,843	Kentwood
Hands of Jesus Food Pantry	90,293	Greenville

TRANSPLANT RECIPIENT GIVES BACK BY GIVING HER TIME.

Tiffany Broyles volunteers at Madison Square Church's food pantry in Grand Rapids. Here, in her own words, is why.



“I choose to volunteer for many reasons: The number-one reason is I want to be able to give back. I am not able to do so financially at the

moment. Plus I have “been there” and even now I still need help from outside sources, too. So I know what it feels like.

I have a lot of free time on my hands. I don't want it to go to waste sitting at home. The desire to serve others feels good, knowing that I am out here helping some people who are less fortunate in our horrible economy makes me feel like I am making a difference in someone's life—be it in a small or large way.

Another reason I chose to volunteer is, I have been blessed because someone gave

me a second chance at life when a donor gave me one of his kidneys. I had to be on Dialysis for years, so my work experience is very small. Dialysis took up almost all of my time. I want the experience and skills to help build up my resume.

Volunteering can give people many opportunities. For me, Madison Square Church gave me the chance to work, even though it is temporary... it is a chance to gain some different work experience and still help people.”

Truckers: “You really have to have a heart for what you do.”

By Katie Auwers,
Food Sourcing Specialist

U.S. Marine and Gulf War veteran Brian Miller has dedicated his career to helping others—and understands the importance of an honest day's work. Brian is one of 14 drivers for Feeding America West Michigan. They may very well be the Food Bank's most visible representatives.

Although many Food Bank employees interact daily with agency representatives, drivers are the only staff members who are there for nearly every facet of the food donation process. Besides picking up food from corporate donors, they also operate the Food Bank's mobile pantries.

Drivers agree that, to operate a Feeding America truck, you must be outgoing and able to connect with all the people the Food Bank serves—donors, agency representatives and pantry clients.

Rob Slonka, a Tennessee native, drives a



mobile pantry three times a week, but his main responsibility is picking up food donations directly from corporate partners. He believes it's important to “get to know people and their needs.” By building positive relationships at the donors' loading docks, Rob helps secure future donations from businesses.

John Yskes, also a Marine*, drives a mobile pantry six days a week. His personality suits the position well. He is outgoing and generous, and enjoys connecting with the families that come to mobile pantry distributions.

When asked about his job, John says it is “truly the most rewarding thing I've ever done.”

One of the challenges many hunger-relief agencies face is reaching out to people who are embarrassed to be seen at a food pantry. But truck drivers know that people who need help are just like any other human beings. Many are husbands and wives with children, and are actively looking for work—people trying to put food on their tables without having their heat turned off—and treat them with respect.

“It takes pride and humility to do what needs to be done to feed your family,” Brian remarks. “We are here for a reason.”

Logistics Manager Russ Sweet, describes his staff as “dedicated and hard-working.” He believes that, in addition to transporting the food safely, drivers often go above and beyond the regular call of duty. “Working directly with people in need drives you to want to do more.”

*Food Bank driver Mark Moran is also a U.S. Marine.

“They help you move on to a better place.”



Deborah Gordon,
a food pantry client

Deborah Gordon is a client of the food pantry at Madison Square Church in Grand Rapids—one of the 1,300 food pantries supplied by Feeding America West Michigan.

For years, Deborah Gordon has suffered from dizziness and debilitating balance problems when she's sitting or standing. She is unable to drive. To try to help Deborah, her doctors have performed a series of spine and brain surgeries—but her condition persists. So Deborah must rely on disability income to survive. “Sometimes my income stretches enough to buy groceries and sometimes it doesn't,” she says. “When it runs short, I have to turn to the [Madison Square] food pantry.”

Despite her illness, Deborah maintains a positive, self-possessed demeanor—and a determination to get better. She relies on the pantry for help in maintaining her health and appreciates that “they try hard to see that you get your nutritional needs met.”

Deborah is very diet-conscious—which isn't easy on a small, fixed income.

Pantry director Nicole Simpson “tries to stock the pantry with what people need,” Deborah says. “They look out for people who are diabetic. They have juices that are healthy, not just a bunch of sugary stuff.”

Besides Madison Square's healthy inventory, Deborah appreciates the “wholesome experience” when she visits the pantry. “You know how some people can make you feel like you're less than they are?” Deborah says. “I have never felt that way (at Madison Square pantry). Nicole doesn't make you feel indigent. She makes you feel like a normal person, like part of a community.”

Because her condition is potentially reversible, “I'd like to get to a point where I'm not disabled,” Deborah says hopefully. “At the pantry, they try to help you move on to the next phase—to a better place.”

To learn more about clients and anti-hunger agencies supported by the Food Bank, visit www.FeedingAmericaWestMichigan.org.



Nicole Simpson,
pantry director

Muskegon “depot” deliveries save gas for cash-strapped agencies

On Thursday, February 2, the Food Bank distributed 14,000 pounds of food in one hour in Muskegon. The occasion: a Muskegon “Depot Delivery.”

Feeding America West Michigan regularly

hosts such “Depot Deliveries” in areas far from our six warehouses, so that cash-strapped agencies don't have to drive all the way to a warehouse to get food.

Future Muskegon Depot Deliveries

will be held on the first and third Thursdays of each month. Contact nancyw@feedingamericawestmichigan.org to learn how your agency can participate in a Depot Delivery.



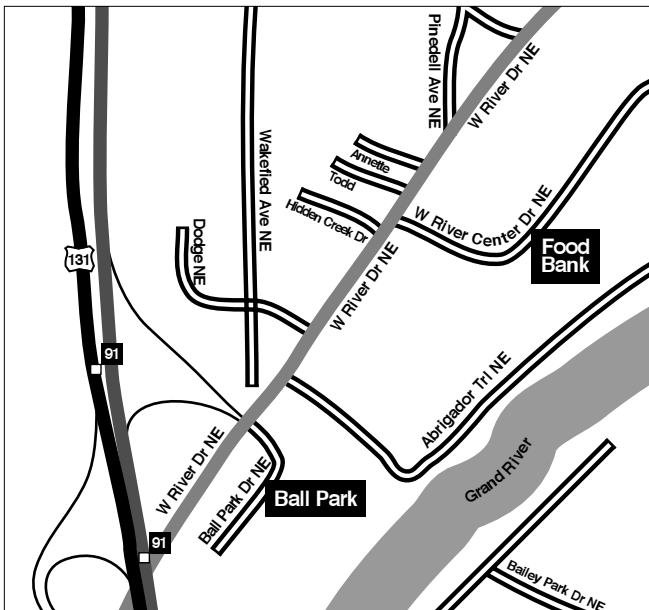
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We're easy to find.**

Take U.S. 131 to exit 91 (Comstock Park/West River Drive).
Turn left on West River Drive. Turn right at the stoplight at
West River Center Drive (Wendy's on corner). Our address is
864 West River Center Dr., Comstock Park, MI 49321-8955
Questions? Call us at 616.784.3250.



Feeding America West Michigan Food Bank is a non-profit surplus food warehouse distributing about 2 million pounds of food monthly in cooperation with 1,300 charitable agencies. The food we handle helps needy families, the unemployed, senior citizens, at-risk children, pregnant teens, domestic violence victims, AIDS patients and others at risk of hunger in our difficult economy. Ultimately, our food aids an estimated 100,000 West Michigan and Upper Peninsula families annually. Call us at 616.784.3250 or learn more at www.FeedingAmericaWestMichigan.org.

Feeding America West Michigan Food Bank is a member of Feeding America – The Nation's Food Bank Network, The United Way, and The Food Bank Council of Michigan.

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