

Full Plate Press

Feeding America West Michigan Food Bank

Fall 2009

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, St. Joseph.

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THE GRACE OF 'THIN PLACES.'

Artist Rick Beerhorst's unique perspective on the Food Bank.

The subjects of Rick Beerhorst's paintings gaze solemnly from the canvas, reminiscent of Medieval saints. Some hold out exquisitely rendered objects – flowers, books, birds – for your consideration. And something in each – an off-center tension, a field of bright color – hints at a fresh, original vision.

Rick is one of a rare breed in any era – a full-time, self-sustaining artist. "I don't have any other job," he says. "I'm blessed to be able to provide for my family with my work."

But artists' incomes can be notoriously uneven. And even though Rick's work now sells for thousands in galleries nationwide, his road hasn't always been paved with gold. He and his wife, who now have six children, know what it's like to turn to a food pantry.

There, he gained perspective on what it's like to need food aid – which became a deep desire to give back. This year, he'll be creating an original work to support our Food Bank's John Arnold Endowment Fund. Limited edition prints will be available through the Food Bank, and offered to guests at the second annual Full Plates Forever event, scheduled for February 5, 2010.

When Rick first sought help from a food pantry, he saw people from his church there. His initial reaction, he admits, was "Oh, no! They'll recognize me." But ultimately, he looks back on the experience as a deeply enriching one.

"I think the biggest blessing for us at the food pantry was, we lost that distance we felt we had from others. I think that, like many people, we had been comforting ourselves with the notion that we were different. I was thinking,

'Wait, I have a graduate degree from a big 10 university! It's not like we're crack addicts.'

"But there we were, the 'Bohemian intellectuals,' shoulder-to-shoulder with people in the same boat, even if we came from different backgrounds. Some people had just lost their factory jobs, others had just come from Eastern Europe. But we were all poor together."

He says he realized then that, "even though I had gotten out of school, my real education was just beginning."

A devout Christian, Rick is also a passionate scholar of other religious traditions. He relates his food bank experience to the Celtic concept of 'thin places.'

"In Celtic theology, a thin place is where the spiritual world is very close and feels very real. It might be a church. It might be a home where there's a lot of love and hospitality. Sometimes it's a food pantry."

In a society that prizes "power and prestige," Rick says that the precious thin places can be hard to find. "Our culture is all

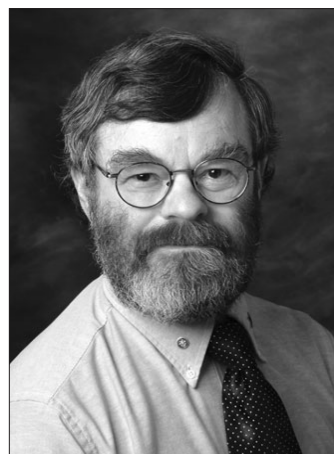
about building bank accounts, and about men getting strong and women getting beautiful. And when you feel powerful in that world, you're not as likely to realize there's another world, the spiritual world, all around you."

In contrast, he says, thin places are where money and power are less dominant, or even absent. "In thin places, people feel vulnerable and transparent. Food pantries are places like that. I try to make my art a place like that, too."

To learn more about Rick Beerhorst, his work and his philosophy, visit studiobeerhorst.com. To learn more about the second annual Full Plates Forever event, where Rick's work will be featured, call Linda Vanderbaan at 616.784.3250.



FROM THE DESK OF JOHN ARNOLD.



My goodness, what a summer this has been! By the end of July, distribution within our 40-county service area is up 2 million pounds from the same period last year. That is a big increase for an old, mature food bank like ours. I am writing this update at the end of the day on August 12. We've had eight shopping days so far in August, and in those days we have distributed 908,000 pounds of food. That is how busy it is at the Food Bank!

To cope with that growth in demand, and to position ourselves to be able to grow even more next year, here are some projects we either now have underway, or are gearing up for:

- Renovating our Reclamation Department to help us safely repack meat products from bulk quantities into consumer-size packages. (A very big thank you to The Dick and Betsy DeVos Foundation and The Daniel and Pamela DeVos Foundation for the grant funds that have made that possible!)

- Introducing on-line ordering for the agencies we supply food to.
- Experimenting with delivering larger orders to agencies.
- Relocating our Ishpeming and St. Joseph branches to larger facilities.
- Expanding our main warehouse's large cooler another 25 feet.
- Adding a freezer to our Reclamation Department.
- Adding a van at our Sault Ste. Marie Branch.
- Installing an electric generator to keep us running when the power grid is down.
- Adding two more mobile pantry trucks.
- And even exploring the possibility of installing an electricity-generating windmill at our main warehouse to make use of the wind that otherwise just shreds our flag.

We are still looking for funding for some of these projects, so please don't hesitate if you've been looking for a good cause to support!

Also, particularly if you have never been to the Food Bank, please consider attending our September 19 "Grateful Plateful Picnic" Open House. You will have a lot of fun, and you will finally get to see where millions of pounds of food per month skip like smooth stones across the surface of a pond on their way from the food industry to needy people across West Michigan.

Who should handle large donations of food?

In better economic times, when the vast majority of charity food programs were serving at most some dozens of families per month instead of hundreds of them, most such agencies were small. There was no question about what they did if they were offered quantities of food far beyond what they needed or could properly handle: They declined the offer and/or referred it over to the Food Bank.

But now in less good economic times, agencies are serving hundreds of families and in some cases have grown quite large. The line is blurring, and more and more often one hears of agencies not only accepting but actively seeking donations of full tractor-trailer-load quantities of goods, essentially in direct competition with the Food Bank.

Is there a "right" or "wrong" or a "better" or "worse" in whether those big loads of product go directly to an agency or to the Food Bank?

Beginning at the donor's door, if the

donation goes to the Food Bank it clearly qualifies for the "cost, plus" tax benefits allowed by Sec. 170(e)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code. If the donation goes directly to an agency, its qualifying for that expanded tax benefit is much less clear. It depends on what the agency does with the product and the sort of records it maintains on its use of the product. Few agencies are equipped to meet those strict IRS requirements.

Similarly, Federal and State "Good Samaritan" food donor liability protection laws require due diligence on both the donor's part and on any recipient organization's part in ensuring the product is transported and stored properly from a health and safety standpoint. If product goes to a Food Bank – with Food Banks being regularly inspected by all manner of food safety enforcement agencies – the donor stands on firm ground. But how many agencies are similarly inspected, particularly with respect to how they might

transport and store excessive quantities of product? And should the worst occur, how many agencies have the multiple millions of dollars' worth of liability insurance coverage that Food Banks have?

Once in either a Food Bank's or an individual agency's possession, who gains access to the donated goods? In the case of product going to the Food Bank, every agency served by the Food Bank has at least a chance of getting some of it. But if it goes to a single agency, it might stop there and be made available to no other agencies, or may be shared with others in ways not allowed by the Internal Revenue Code if the donor has claimed an expanded deduction for the donation. At best normally only a few agencies benefit. While it is true they probably get more of the product than they would have had it gone to the Food Bank, the fact that only an arbitrary few agencies benefit from it has to be weighed against the benefit of having all agencies in the area possibly share some of it.

THANKSGIVING TO COME IN SEPTEMBER THIS YEAR.

Thanks to volunteers and donors, over the past year, the Feeding America West Michigan Food Bank has met its biggest challenge ever: Keeping up with the fast-growing needs of 1,300 food agencies in 40 counties—and increasing food distribution by 10%!

And wow, are we ever thankful! So

we're giving thanks on Saturday, September 19 with the Grateful Plateful Picnic. It's a celebration our volunteers' and donors' incredible success fighting hunger so far.

If you're a volunteer, donor or other Food Bank supporter, we'd love to see you there. Please join us for food*, drinks,

music by Full Cord Bluegrass, facility tours – and lots of fun – at the Food Bank from 12 noon to 4 pm.

We'd be truly grateful to see you and your family there.

**Don't worry: We won't be wasting food! Sponsors are helping us put on this picnic just for you. So please don't miss it!*



Online ordering helps food move more efficiently.

Not too long ago, Friday afternoons at the Food Bank were a lot like action movies. Okay, there weren't any car crashes (although some computers might have gone down). The reason was our old-fashioned, cobbled-together ordering system.

The 1,300 agencies who rely on us for food used to get our weekly food list by regular mail, email and fax. The list was a Microsoft Publisher document that had to be created and updated manually. Our database of agency fax numbers, email addresses and mailing addresses changed frequently, too. Like the food list, it required manual updates.

Time and paper were wasted all week long. And then there were Friday afternoons, when we took phone orders. Starting at 1pm, when the weekly list of available food was posted, we usually got 30 to 60 phone calls. Many agencies reported busy

signals lasting up to an hour. And long-distance charges were taking their toll on strained agency budgets.

Fortunately, since April, we've been offering online ordering. Our online food list is updated automatically when new products come into the Food Bank. Agencies can check the list and order online 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Our system responds with an automatic email that tells the agency we have received their order and lets them

confirm the items ordered, quantities, total weight and processing fees.

We save about \$1500.00 per year in postage because we don't have to mail out food lists. That's in addition to all the man-hours we save updating food and mailing lists.

More than 500 agencies have signed up for online ordering, and we anticipate that the vast majority will be using the new system soon.



Jane Claus from our Agency Relations Team is handling your orders.

Hearty Fresh donations live up to their name.

From its 75,000-square-foot facility in Byron Center, Hearty Fresh, Inc. grows, packs, and distributes fresh produce – apples to zucchini – from multiple nearby growers.

And when they have surplus produce, they generously share with neighbors in need through the Food Bank.

“We hate to see food go to waste when there are so many needy people around,” says Hearty Fresh spokesman Maynard Flikkema. “Donating to the Food Bank is so easy. You just call them and say you have extra product and they come pick it up.”

Over the past year, Hearty Fresh has donated 662,000 pounds



Donor Relations Manager Linda Vanderbaan with Hearty Fresh's Maynard Flikkema.

(more than 330 tons) of fresh fruits and vegetables to the Food Bank.

“Hearty Fresh’s fine produce is a welcome addition to donated processed foods and, thanks to our Mobile Pantry trucks and other efficiencies, we’re able to distribute it while it’s still at peak quality,” says Food Bank Assistant Director Teresa Pawl-Knapp.

If you know a grower, packer, distributor or retailer who sometimes has surplus food, please refer them to the Food Bank. Not only can we pick up the excess, saving

the donor disposal fees, they may also qualify for unexpected tax benefits. Call Linda Vanderbaan at (616) 784-3250.

Center for High Impact Philanthropy recognizes our Food Bank.

Sometime in September, The Center for High Impact Philanthropy at the University of Pennsylvania will post its on-line quarterly newsletter. This fall's edition will focus on nonprofit programs around the country that are especially efficient and/or effective in dealing with basic human needs in the current economic downturn.

An article about the Feeding America West Michigan Food Bank is planned for this edition. This is a big honor for our Food Bank. The Center is widely recognized for providing data that help philanthropists nationwide plan their giving for maximum effect.

Look for the article about the Food Bank in the Center's online fall newsletter at www.impact.upenn.edu.

Aging fleet keeps on truckin'.



As you might imagine, the Food Bank's vehicle fleet is indispensable to gathering and distributing surplus food throughout our 30,000-square-mile service area: the longest end-to-end of any Food Bank in the continental U.S.

From the Indiana border 625 miles north to the Mackinac Bridge, our trucks take the products to all of our lower peninsula branches and our affiliate, The Manna Project in Petoskey. A typical

weekly round trip totals 742 miles. For the fleet, that's 38,584 miles a year.

Each month, trucks also make two trips to our two branches and one affiliate in the Upper Peninsula for 4,052 miles, or a yearly total of 48,624.

We also deliver monthly to six depots in five counties: another 6,840 miles per

year. Then there are the and Mobile Pantry distributions of 61,680 a year and other local and regional donations that add more than 60,000 miles a year.

Of course, along with deliveries, we use the trucks to pick up donations from food

producers, farmers and other donors throughout the area. Pick-up locations include 21 WalMarts and five Sam's Clubs. That's another 4,289 miles weekly, a yearly total of 223,028 miles.

All together, our fleet logs 431,917 miles annually – not bad for trucks ranging in age from eight years to ancient.



The big chill.

Mobile Pantry growth demands larger cooler.

Back in 1998 when it started, our Mobile Pantry program distributed 2.2 million pounds. Distribution more than doubled in year two, and it's now more than 8 million pounds. If demand continues to grow as projected, our Mobile Pantry trucks will have to distribute 10 million pounds in 2010.

To do that, we'll need to expand our cooler (from 2800 to 3675 square feet) and add a second door. This will make it

easier for us reclaim more perishables, store them safely and load them onto our trucks more efficiently.

The expansion should cost about \$50,000. Remember, that will let us expand our annual distribution by at least 2 million pounds. Please consider donating using the enclosed envelope, or give online at FeedingAmericaWestMichigan.org. And please spread the word to help up raise some truly cold cash.

Mobile Pantries roll past more milestones.

In August, the Mobile Pantry program (which takes food to areas that need more help than local pantries can provide) marked its 8,000th distribution. Also in August, the Mobile Pantry program distributed its 55,000,000th pound of food. That's 55 million, folks. Not bad for a program that started with a few reclaimed beer trucks, 11 years ago.



Feds feed families.



All summer long, federal employees in West Michigan – and around the country – are rallying to help feed hungry families in their communities through the new “Feds Feed Families” program. The government-sponsored initiative, which started in June and lasts through the end of August, encourages civilian employees to donate to their local food banks.

In West Michigan, the initiative is being coordinated through the U.S. Attorney's Office in Grand Rapids. Some of the federal agencies that are participating the Feds Feed Families Food Drive are the U.S. District Court and the Bankruptcy Court, regional offices of the FBI, the IRS, the Government Services Administration, the U.S. Marshals Service, U.S. Probation and the Federal Office of Defender Services.

“The need for food is so fundamental, and we're gratified to be able to do something extra to assist our communities,” says United States Attorney Don Davis. “Every federal office we contacted responded

enthusiastically.”

In West Michigan, both non-perishable food and dollar donations are being sought. “We're incredibly grateful for the additional support from federal employees in our area,” says Food Bank Executive Director John Arnold. “Every extra dollar helps provide 33 meals to neighboring families. And of course, we can make good use of donated food, too.”

Donations will be accepted in federal offices through August 31. Davis emphasized that the Combined Federal Campaign, a long-standing charitable initiative, will begin as usual in the fall.

A BIG RE-DO IN RECLAMATION.

Thanks to two major grants, the Food Bank Reclamation department will soon be remodeled to meet the latest Michigan Department of Agriculture standards for processing meat and other bulk food donations into consumer-sized packages.

Funding for the remodeling includes a \$30,000 grant from the

Dick and Betsy DeVos Foundation and \$11,750 from the Daniel and Pamella DeVos Foundation.

Remodeling began in August and will continue slightly into September. First up for repackaging: five truckloads of chicken legs currently frozen in 55 pound blocks.



Help us power on when the power goes out.

What happens at the Food Bank when a storm or accident brings the power lines down? Not a darn thing. And that's a big problem.

A single day without electricity stops the flow of 100,000 pounds of food aid to 40 counties. That missing food can be especially devastating in bad weather, when local pantries are likely to need it the most. Obviously, we need a back-up generator.

The challenge is, the kind of generators you buy at home stores aren't nearly large enough to keep our 55,000-square-foot warehouse, with its huge cooler and freezer, running. We need a large diesel generator, which costs \$50,000 to \$60,000. But that's a small price to pay, considering we distribute more than that in food (at retail value) in just half a day.

Unless you have a spare in your garage, we could really use your help in fund-raising. If you'd like to donate to the generator fund, you can use the enclosed envelope, and just write "diesel generator" on the memo line of your check. Or visit our website at FeedingAmericaWestMichigan.org and click on the "Donate Now" button.

Tip-Off golf outing scores \$1000 and 207 pounds.

The first annual golf outing sponsored by Comstock Park's Tip-Off Sports Bar and Grill teed off July 25 at Grand Rapids' Alpine Golf Course. At the end of the day, 13 foursomes had raised \$1,000 – enough to obtain almost 10,000 pounds of food.

Players also donated more than 200 pounds of food.

"We wanted to do something special for the community," says Tip-Off manager Justin Karamol. "We thought about different charities we could help out, and we chose the Food Bank because we heard great things about them. Plus they're our neighbors!"

"We'll definitely hold the golf outing to help the Food Bank again next year."



Volunteers come from Bethlehem.

...Bethlehem Lutheran Church, that is. Since 2003, volunteers from the Grand Rapids congregation have been showing up at the Food Bank. And since 2004, a core group of about 15 have shown up the first Saturday of each month to help repack bulk food in the Reclamation Department.

Bethlehem volunteers also show up frequently for gleaning efforts. In total, church members have logged more than 1500 volunteer hours to date.

According to Bethlehem member Reneé Veach, "Food Bank volunteering at is such a wonderful way to give back not just to our local community, but also to most of Michigan.

On top of all that, the church has been hosting monthly Mobile Pantry distributions since the beginning of this year. At their regular



visits, the volunteers heard about the Mobile Pantry program, and decided to host regular distributions in their church parking lot.

"We're in a needy part of town. It's a great feeling when people walking by are able to pick out some food, and they say, 'You have no idea how much you have helped us. We didn't know how we would feed the kids this week.' It's just amazing to hear people's stories," Renee says.

According to Food Bank Volunteer Coordinator Dena Rogers, "It's well-known here that when this group comes, serious work gets done!" Between warehouse volunteering and hosting the Mobile Pantries, it's obvious that folks from Bethlehem have what it takes to fight hunger."

HYDROPONICS HELP HEIGHTEN DONATIONS.

Mark your calendars for September 26: the day the second annual Grand Harvest Festival happens.

Hosted by Horizen Hydroponics of Grand Rapids, the festival will feature live music by the Ragbirds world/folk/bluegrass band, "green" vendors and a live remote broadcast by Gerry Barnaby of 95.7 WLHT Radio.

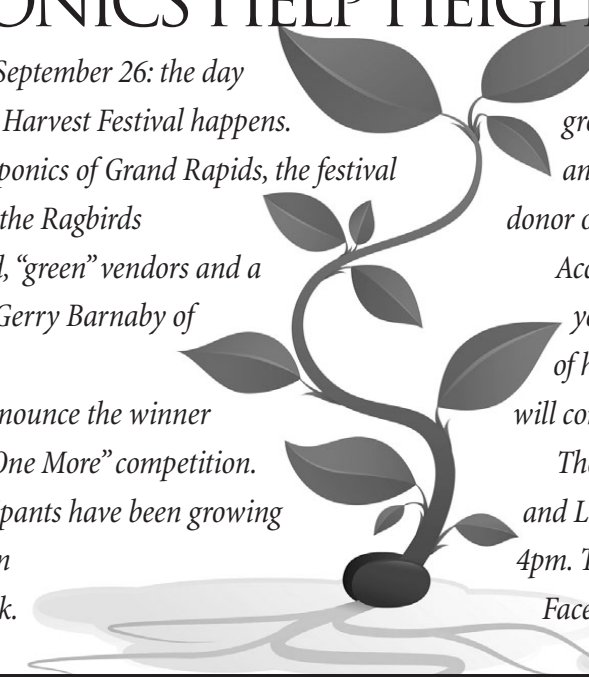
Also, Horizen will announce the winner of its season-long "Grow One More" competition. Since June, contest participants have been growing extra rows of home-grown produce for the Food Bank.

Horizen will award \$500 worth of hydroponic growing equipment, including lights, starter trays and growing containers and supplements, to the donor of the most food to date.

According to Horizen spokesman Bob Zuidema, this year's goal is to donate 2,000 pounds – a full ton – of home-grown food. Even after the contest, donations will continue throughout the fall harvest season.

The festival will take place at the corner of Walker and Leonard Streets in Grand Rapids from 11am until 4pm. To learn more, go to the Horizen (with an "e")

Facebook page or email hydrostore@hydro.com.



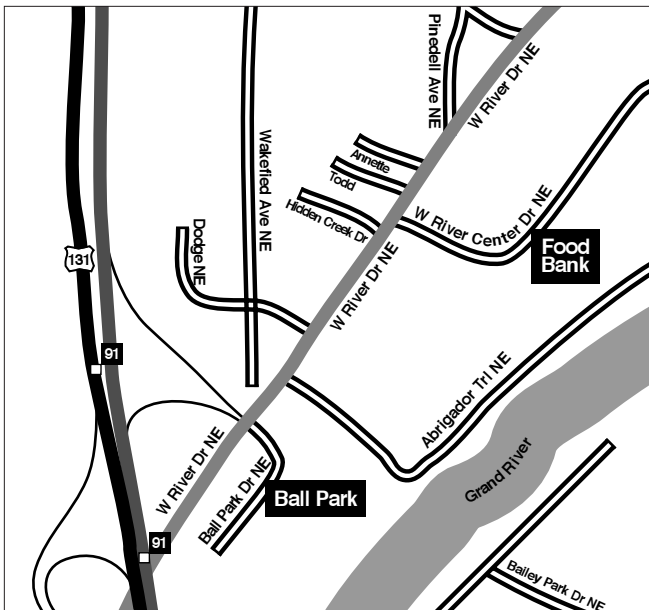


West Michigan Food Bank 864 West River Center
Comstock Park, Michigan 49321-8955
Formerly Second Harvest Gleaners Food Bank of West Michigan, Inc.

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VISITING THE FOOD BANK? 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 1.8 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 400,000 West Michigan and Upper Peninsula residents 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.

Graphic Design: Mary Jo Cooper
Contributing Writer: Judy Bean

