

Full Plate PRESS

THE NEWSLETTER OF
**FEEDING
AMERICA**
West Michigan Food Bank

Spring Newsletter 2013

Grand Valley Students Deepen Education by Serving Community

It's Friday morning, and three fraternity brothers are elbows-deep in a 500-pound produce bin.

"We're sorting out moldy carrots," freshman nursing major Jake Walker explains. "We're getting rid of the bad eggs."

The brothers belong to the Grand Valley State University chapter of Kappa Sigma. They learned about Feeding America West Michigan through Grand Valley's Community Service Learning website, which maintains a database of service opportunities in the region.

College students made up 15 percent of the Food Bank's volunteer force in 2012, and more than half were from Grand Valley.

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GVSU students bag turnips for food-insecure families, reinforcing concepts learned in their ethics course.

To Boost Fresh Foods, Food Bank Starts a Farm

Picture 60,000 seedlings breaching the top soil on a farm in Ottawa County. Then imagine those seedlings growing into 6-foot-tall stalks ripe with ears of sweet corn, each one destined for the plate of someone struggling with hunger.

As you read this, that's exactly what's happening.

In 2012, the West Michigan Agricultural Education Center (WMAEC) donated a portion of its lease on the Eastmanville Farm in Polkton Township, just north of the Grand River, to Feeding America West Michigan. This spring, those three acres will be planted and harvested — with help from WMAEC — by the Food Bank.

Our first crop will be sweet corn. It's easy to grow, it's nutritious, and it's something almost everyone knows how to cook.

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The historic Eastmanville Farm is now an educational center for young farmers and the public.



Farmer and educator Matt Hehl will supervise the Food Bank Farm.



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Feeding America West Michigan Food Bank is a non-profit surplus food warehouse distributing about 2 million pounds of food monthly in cooperation with over 1,200 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 reaches 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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From Ken's Keyboard:

The past few months have been especially busy. As a result of a generous grant, we were able to create an additional office area and improve our reclamation space. We received three used electric forklifts from another generous company, and have added a brand-new straight truck, underwritten by the Hussman Foundation and the Walmart Foundation, to our fleet. All of these changes are helping us continue to meet the demand for food assistance in our community.

That need has not faded. Over the past year our food distribution has grown — so far, 2013 has continued that trend, as our distribution has increased by more than 10 percent. Even though we hear about improvements in the economy, families continue to find it difficult to consistently get the food they need.

The good news is that many processors, distributors, grocery retailers and farmers have stepped up to provide the needed food. We're so grateful for these partners. We're also indebted to the many dedicated volunteers that help inspect, sort, label and repackage the food we receive. Fighting hunger is truly a community effort. If you have not yet had the opportunity to visit the Food Bank or volunteer, please consider stopping by our main warehouse in Comstock Park. We would be happy to give you a tour, and you can sign up to volunteer by contacting Dena Rogers at 616-389-6351 or DenaR@FeedingAmericaWestMichigan.org.

Your gift of time, money or food ensures that help is always available to those in need.

Ken Estelle, CEO



One Meal Multiplied

Join keynote speaker Chief Judge Sara Smolenski for a little fundraising and a lot of levity at Feeding America West Michigan's Summer Fundraising Luncheon on June 4. Together we'll enjoy a good meal, honor a few of our partners and advance our mission in West Michigan.

The luncheon will be held from 12-1:15 p.m. at The Goei Center in Grand Rapids. Plates are \$25 each, and we expect them to fly. To sign up, contact Linda Vanderbaan at 616-389-6356 or LindaV@FeedingAmericaWestMichigan.org.



Chief Judge and local humorist Sara Smolenski will deliver the keynote on June 4.

March with Us This Spring

On Saturday, May 18, Feeding America West Michigan is teaming up with Harbor Humane Society to host the Million Meal March 5K Hike at the Outdoor Discovery Center in Holland.

The Million Meal March 5K is an all-ages, all-abilities hike ideal for those looking to get some fresh air while advancing the fight against hunger. Dogs are welcome too (but don't forget that leash).

The hike begins at 10 a.m., and registration opens at 9:30. Sign up, download pledge forms and get directions at MillionMealMarch.org/5k.



The Million Meal March 5K Hike on May 18 is open to everyone—kids and dogs alike.

Grand Valley Students Deepen Education by Serving Community

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“Grand Valley students are by far some of our best workers,” said Dena Rogers, volunteer coordinator at the Food Bank. “We’ve had a strong rapport with them for years.”

Jeff Mutch, Community Service Learning coordinator at Grand Valley, explains that many professors use service as a way to illustrate principles taught in class.

“We just find that getting students out into the community and doing service is a great way for them to really learn about themselves and learn about their place in the world,” Jeff says.

Some students volunteer for social reasons. Others, simply because they love doing it.

One of those students is Michelle Vader, a fifth-year senior studying special education. She’s also the president of the Hunger and Homelessness student organization, which works with charities like Mel Trotter, Kids’ Food Basket and Feeding America West Michigan.

For Michelle, bringing classmates to the Food Bank is a way to pull back the curtain on hunger relief, to show them how food gets from manufacturers to neighborhood food pantries.

When pitching the Food Bank to her classmates, Michelle talks about the satisfaction that comes from leaving her books behind, donning a hairnet and physically preparing bags of cereal and boxes of beans for families in need. “It can change your life and lead you on a stronger path than you were on before. It gives you a purpose.”

To Boost Fresh Foods, Food Bank Starts a Farm

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“The benefit for us is not only that it’s going to be a product that we don’t normally get donated, but we can plan for it,” said food sourcing specialist Katie Auwers. “We can stagger the planting so we can harvest week to week, so we know that it’s coming.”

Matt Hehl, a full-time hog and grain farmer and a member of WMAEC, will manage the farm. “I just think it’s a worthwhile cause, and it speaks well of the local farmers and their willingness to give back to the community they make their living in,” Matt said.

After all, he added, feeding the hungry is “something that we do and we do well.”

Katie hopes that in addition to providing badly needed produce to families in need, the Food Bank Farm will further WMAEC’s work to educate people about modern agriculture, especially the hundreds of volunteers needed to harvest the crop. “People ought to be interested in it,” Katie said. “It’s part of our culture.”

Many Donors Complete Much-Needed Renovation

If you visited the Food Bank in February, you might have noticed it was a little noisier than usual. Lain over the usual chorus of agency orders, forklift horns and truck engines, was the sound of a much-needed renovation to our staff and volunteer spaces.

Funded by an anonymous donor, the project created eight new workstations and a safer place for volunteers to sort donations.

When the lead contractor, Mark Schaafsma Design Build, and their crew of subcontractors learned that the Food Bank can turn each donated dollar into four meals, they started a competition to see who could save the most money, said project manager Bob Thomassen. They did some digging and procured many of the materials for free and billed much of their work at cost.

“It’s really fun once you get everyone together,” Bob said. “It’s kind of like the old story, stone soup, you know? Anything we can save puts food on people’s tables, and that’s what this is about.”

To our donor, to Mark Schaafsma Design Build and to everyone else who was involved with this renovation, thank you for helping us work more safely and efficiently.



Food Bank staff praised the care and efficiency of Mark Schaafsma Design Build’s workers.

UWUA Local 388 Hosts Fund Drive

Inspired by a poster showing how much food \$10 can provide at the Food Bank, the Utility Workers Union of America Local 388 in Ottawa County voted unanimously to host a fund drive. They collected \$1,800 but didn't stop there.

They asked the UWUA and their employer, Consumers Energy, to match it, and they did. Together, the three organizations donated \$5,400, enough to provide 21,600 meals to struggling Michigan families.

Our sincere thanks to Local 388, the UWUA and Consumer's Energy for their terrific support.



Local 388 Secretary and Treasurer Dan Pfeffer and Vice President Bill Chadwick pictured with Food Bank CEO Ken Estelle, center.

Fighting Hunger in Ski Mask and Helmet

Every weekend during this year's long ski season, Cannonsburg Ski Area held their Saturday Night Food Drive for Feeding America West Michigan. The rules were simple: Donate \$2 or two cans of food and get your lift ticket half-off.

With this ingenious concept, Cannonsburg collected 790 pounds of food and \$1,433, enough to send 6,350 meals to food-insecure Michiganders. Thank you, Cannonsburg!



Photo courtesy of Cannonsburg Ski Area and Alycia Choroszuca

Middle School Food Drive Scores Big

This past fall, students from Belding Middle School collected over 1,500 pounds of food for Feeding America West Michigan as part of Central Michigan University's Hoops Against Hunger Food Drive. Statewide, students collected 7,200 pounds of food and \$1,767.

To learn how you can raise food and funds, visit FeedingAmericaWestMichigan.org/GiveFood/Drive.



Belding Middle School collected over 1,500 pounds of food.

Hannah: Mother, Student, Mobile Pantry Client

On a single-digit morning in January, Hannah stood in line at the Mobile Food Pantry at St. Patrick's Catholic Church in Grand Haven. With her hood pulled up against the cold, Hannah described her first year studying for a human service degree at Baker College. The last several months had been a struggle.

Until September, both Hannah and her husband had been working, supporting themselves and their young son. But Hannah made it one week into her classes before she realized something had to give. "If I worked, everything I would be working for would go into childcare ...," she said. "So I stay home with my son, and I go to school at night."

Her husband's income puts them over the food assistance threshold by \$20 a week. The family is barely skating over the poverty line. "We were eating dinner at my mom's a lot," Hannah said.

It was her mom who spotted a sign for the Mobile Pantry at St. Patrick's. The food is good, and the abundance of vegetables makes it possible to cook healthy meals for her family. "It's helped a lot."

Someday, Hannah won't need to stand in the snow to collect food. Her son will start school, and she'll complete her degree. But until then, resources like the Mobile Pantry at St. Patrick's Catholic Church will help her get by.

Mobile Pantries help thousands of people like Hannah every year. Watch our new video and learn more at FeedingAmericaWestMichigan.org/Mobile.

