

# Full Plate PRESS

THE NEWSLETTER OF **FEEDING AMERICA**  
West Michigan

## A Farmer and a “Lunch Lady” Bring Local Food to Northwest Michigan Schools

Brandon Seng had a dilemma. He ran the meal program at Manistee Area Public Schools, and he wanted to put more locally grown produce on the menu. But with Northwest Michigan’s short growing season, that was hard to do.

That’s when he started talking to Mark Coe from nearby Lutz Farms. Between the two of them — a farmer and a self-described “lunch lady” — the idea for the Farm to Freezer program was born.

They would buy produce from local farmers, freeze it, package it and sell it to school districts, giving a boost to the farmers and a source of year-round local food for the schools.

When Brandon became executive director of Food Rescue of Northwest Michigan, part of Goodwill Industries of Northern Michigan and a partner of Feeding America West Michigan, he brought the idea with him. Brandon and Mark started Farm to Freezer in 2013 with seed money from the Schmuckal and Olsen foundations, and the program expanded quickly, supplying 22 schools and grossing \$250,000 in just its third year.

That revenue is funneled right back into hunger relief at Food Rescue. But it also benefits another group of people: the workers themselves.



Feeding America West Michigan’s Katie Auwers talks with Mark Coe and Brandon Seng at Farm to Freezer in Traverse City.

From dicing and blanching cauliflower to sealing packages of frozen strawberries, every part of Farm to Freezer’s process is done by hand by workers from Goodwill’s job-training program.

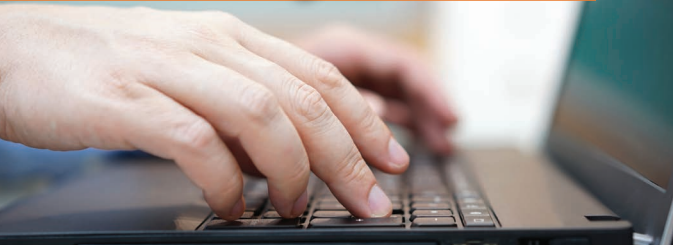
One of those workers is Mike Bernhardt. Mike had a degree in environmental and industrial health management and a career in community health, but he also had a drinking problem. When Mike was in rehab, Brandon approached him and offered him a job. Today, Mike leads a team of six at Farm to Freezer.

“That’s really the idea of the program, to give people a job when they need a break,” Mike said, “and that’s what they did for me.”



Team leader Mike Bernhardt and Mark Coe, chopping cauliflower.

## From Ken's Keyboard:



This was a record-setting year for Feeding America West Michigan. We distributed more food than ever before: 27.6 million pounds, the equivalent of 22 million meals. That's a whole lot of good food reaching kids, adults and seniors in 40 counties throughout West Michigan and the Upper Peninsula.

If that sounds strangely familiar, it should. This was our third record year in a row for food distribution. That's both good news and bad. It's good news because it demonstrates that with your support — the support of our volunteers, donors, food suppliers, agency partners and staff — we are able to provide an unprecedented amount of food to people in our region. It's bad news because the need for that food has not gone away.

That's why, even as we remain focused on the daily work of sourcing and distributing food, we're pursuing our ultimate goal of ending hunger. We're working toward this goal by strengthening our collaborations with organizations that can actually reduce the need itself.

New initiatives like the Community Food Club of Greater Grand Rapids that provide low-cost groceries to members; partnerships with agencies like Boys and Girls Club Youth Commonwealth in Kent County or Community Action House in Holland that invest in the future of our children and the stability of our families; and distribution agreements with our peers at Food Rescue of Northwest Michigan, which supports rehab programs and job training.

As long as there is a need for food in our community, we at Feeding America West Michigan will do everything in our power to fill it. But I also look forward to the day when more and more of the families we serve no longer need our services but can stand on their own, proudly and self-sufficiently.

So to that end, I ask you to join me in the effort to solve hunger in West Michigan and the Upper Peninsula. With your help, I know we can.



Kenneth R. Estelle, CEO

## GR Montessori Recognized at Lansing Awards Ceremony

In November, four teachers and three students from Grand Rapids Montessori at North Park traveled to Lansing to receive a Beacon of Light Award from Michigan Attorney General Bill Schuette.



North Park student Erin Waldron accepts a Beacon of Light Award from Michigan Attorney General Bill Schuette on behalf of her school.

Volunteer coordinator Dena Rogers nominated North Park for this award because of their long-standing partnership with Feeding America West Michigan. Under the leadership of teacher Dave Huyser, North Park students began volunteering at the Food Bank in 2006. Whether picking apples at Ridgeview Orchards or sorting carrots in our warehouse, North Park students serve with enthusiasm, curiosity and a passion for helping those in need.

## Keeping It Fresh at the Food Bank

Any way you look at it — by volume or by percentage — 2015 was a record year for fruits and vegetables. Today, more than a third of the food we send out into the community is fresh produce.

Food sourcing specialist Katie Auwers points to the growth of our Mobile Food Pantry program as a primary driver. Each Mobile Pantry features thousands of pounds of produce, and the program saw huge expansions at local schools thanks to a grant from the Michigan Health Endowment Fund.

Auwers also credits a few individual donors with making the difference this year. Kerlikowske Family Farms donated 720,099 pounds of watermelon. Pero Family Farms increased their donations of peppers and other vegetables by 200,000 pounds. Pearson Foods, Marker Farms, Heeren Brothers and apple grower Mark Near — along with smaller growers like Ham Family Farm and Jollay Orchards — also increased their donations this year.



# Food Banker Profile: Pattijeane McCahill

*Pattijeane McCahill joined Feeding America West Michigan in October 2015 as our new development director. She has an MBA from Northwestern University and a master of public administration from Grand Valley State University.*

**Q:** What did you do prior to becoming the Food Bank's new development director?

**A:** I have over 20 years in corporate marketing and strategy experience, working for multinational corporations. And then in 2010 I went back to graduate school and worked at the Johnson Center for Philanthropy and also the Kent County Parks Foundation prior to coming here.

**Q:** Have you always been interested in nonprofit work?

**A:** No. When I was in business school, nonprofit wasn't a career path. A few years ago I completely reevaluated what I was doing and decided that I wanted to have a second career in addressing childhood obesity, so working here is an incredible opportunity to provide people access to fresh, healthy food.

**Q:** Why are you interested in food insecurity and obesity?

**A:** I love food. I grew up in a large Irish Catholic family where we had a sit-down family dinner five days a week. That type of scenario doesn't exist for families that are food insecure, but it could. Hunger and obesity are highly correlated. Providing access to healthy food options through the food bank is an opportunity to address both issues.

**Q:** What are your goals as development director?

**A:** Achieving our mission is my development goal. But I think specifically from a development perspective, we have all these amazing individual donors and volunteers who give because they care about our mission. Connecting with individuals that are passionate about the mission is my main objective.

**Q:** What are you interested in outside of work?

**A:** I run. I swim. I bike. I hike. I love the outdoors. (She played volleyball for Northwestern.) I have 35 nieces and nephews and nine brothers and sisters and I have one son, and we're a very tight-knit family. I have great friends. And basketball. I love basketball.

**Q:** Who do you cheer for?

**A:** I bleed purple. I always cheer for Northwestern and the Big Ten, but then within the Big Ten I have a hierarchy of teams. If it's basketball, it's Michigan, then Michigan State, then Illinois. I hardly ever cheer for Ohio State, only if I have to.

## JOIN THE CLUB

A monthly gift feeds neighbors in need all year long. Join our Monthly Giving program.  
FeedWM.org/Donate.

## Cargill, GFS Donate 50,000 Meals

This fall was all about hunger relief for Cargill and Gordon Food Service. The two food donors collaborated on a series of fundraisers and food drives that resulted in more than 50,000 additional meals for local families.

The events included weekly Jeans Day fundraisers, the Oct. 7 GFS Food Show in Grand Rapids, where volunteers collected leftover food, and a massive food drive at the GFS home office on Nov. 6. With an \$8,000 contribution from Cargill, the two companies raised a total of 50,449 meals.



# FEEDING AMERICA<sup>®</sup>

## West Michigan

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*Feeding America West Michigan exists to ensure safe food is available to the hungry in our community. By working with over 1,100 hunger-relief agencies, we are able to serve an estimated 492,100 people in West Michigan and the Upper Peninsula each year.*

Call us at 616.784.3250 or learn more at [FeedWM.org](http://FeedWM.org).

Feeding America West Michigan Food Bank is a member of Feeding America, The United Way, and The Food Bank Council of Michigan.



### You Can Feed West Michigan

To give online please visit us at [FeedWM.org](http://FeedWM.org)



## Out of the Ashes: Carolyn's Story

You can still smell the smoke from the fire when you step into Carolyn Braun's house. It was October of 2012, less than a week before her birthday, when a fire started in one of the bedrooms — a curling iron left on a bed. It took the fire truck 45 minutes to reach them, but by that time, her husband, Paul, had gotten it under control with a fire extinguisher. No one was hurt, but a lot was lost.

All the food in the cabinets, everything made of plastic or fabric — it all had to be thrown out because of the smoke damage. "I couldn't even use my purse. It was all pitch black, just black," Carolyn said. "You don't think of all the small stuff in life."

It was the latest in a string of tragedies in Carolyn's life. In a few short years, she'd suffered the deaths of her first husband, Rick, her mother and one of her beloved horses. Yet she was determined not to lose hope. "You just gotta pray," she said. "You gotta think of the positive. We still had the house. We still had the kids."

As they began to rebuild, Benzie Area Christian Neighbors (BACN), a Feeding America West Michigan agency, helped Carolyn put food on the table and clothes in the closets. "Instead of going to spend this money in the grocery store, you can save money there and apply it where you need to put it," she said.

*"You can't look back. You have to go forward and keep praying."*

BACN has been serving its corner of Northwest Michigan for 30 years. Much of its food comes from Feeding America West Michigan's branch in Cadillac. The rest is donated by neighbors or purchased at grocery stores. Executive director Gerri VanAntwerp emphasized their reliance on volunteers, including current and former clients like Carolyn. "Everybody has a gift to give and a need to be met," she said.

One of Carolyn's gifts is encouragement. By volunteering at BACN and working as a life coach, she helps people access the kinds of resources that made such a difference to her family.

"A lot of people don't know about these services," she said, "or they feel downgraded and embarrassed. I say, it's not the embarrassment of going out [for help], it's the embarrassment of staying home, especially when you have kids."

Her kids are a source of tremendous pride for Carolyn. Cierra, 12, is a Girl Scout, steady and focused, while Christina, 7, is energetic and outgoing. Crystal, her oldest, plans to attend Michigan State University next year. All three are excellent students.

"You have to keep your mind flowing and keep a positive attitude," Carolyn says. "You can't look back. You have to go forward and keep praying."