

INSIDE SCOOP



Eastern Illinois
Foodbank



HAVING A HEART FOR HUNGER



"More and more of our clients are elderly. Many of them have to choose between their medications and food."
-Evelyn Ribordy, St. Vincent dePaul Food Pantry, Pontiac



"Just because I help you with food doesn't mean you aren't a good neighbor to me."
-Kiki Brown, Salvation Army Bloomington



"There's always an unknown story behind it all."
-Robin Mathis, Salvation Army Champaign



"Our true concern for others is our greatest asset."
- Nancy O'Kane, St Vincent dePaul Food Pantry, Danville



"The food at the food center is the difference between someone making it and being able to take care of themselves and not."
- Mary Jo Eberspacher, Mattoon Community Food Center



"All of us have had help from somewhere at some time, and for a lot of people, what we provide is a necessity."
- Shelly Andrews, Embarras River Basin Agency, Newton

When it comes to alleviating hunger, it's about more than food. It's about people, partnerships and hope, and our local agencies are at the heart of what we do. Eastern Illinois Foodbank works with more than 160 partners in 18 counties to provide food for over 120,000 people in eastern Illinois. We decided to visit with some of our partner food pantries to find out what makes their communities so special. We discovered a common thread of caring woven throughout the different communities, from food pantry directors to volunteers to clients. We found that **dignity, respect, and kindness are what having a heart for hunger is all about.**

In Coles County, Mattoon Community Food Center volunteer Mary Jo Eberspacher has seen an increase in the number of grandparents that have become the sole provider for their grandchildren. One client works at a local motel and is responsible for the care of her three grandchildren. **"She's willing to go without food but not willing to let her grandchildren go without,"** Mary Jo recalls. She noted that if someone has a minor catastrophe — such as a broken-down car — they may need access to food so they can use their money on other necessities. **"That's a way we can make a difference. They can pay their rent or bills."**

Evelyn Ribordy at the St. Vincent DePaul Food Pantry in Pontiac has also seen a large number of seniors that have taken on a guardian role for their grandchildren. One such client, a Vietnam veteran, comes to the pantry because his disability and social security benefits don't quite stretch far enough. **"We might struggle, but at least we are doing it as a family,"** he notes. "It used to be a single unit of mom and dad, with dad being the breadwinner. But as times got hard, mom jumped in to be the breadwinner or to make ends meet. Now it is the grandparents who have to help."

In Champaign County, Robin Mathis of the Salvation Army Food Pantry sees a lot of clients who are going through a hard time but are hesitant to ask for help. She

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Eastern Illinois
Foodbank



DIRECTOR'S LETTER



Dear friends and supporters,

Over the last six months, in addition to our daily food deliveries, our staff have been on the road more than usual — visiting partner agencies, listening to clients, attending local meetings, and strengthening relationships in the communities we serve. The goal is to strengthen our local presence as we work to better understand the strengths and challenges of each community in our 18-county service area. We've ventured across the Burl Ives Bridge in Newton, explored the back roads between Pontiac and Chatsworth, navigated Veteran's Parkway around Bloomington-Normal, manned a tent at the David Palmer Arena in Danville and much, much more.



Although each community is unique and no two pantries or feeding programs are alike, **a thread of caring runs through every aspect of our work.**

From partners like Kiki Brown at the McLean County Salvation Army, who views clients as valuable members of her community, to volunteers like Evelyn Ribordy, who shares a hug and a smile with everyone who enters the St. Vincent DePaul Pantry in Pontiac, the sense of mutual caring and respect is palpable.

And that sense of caring and respect is not limited to staff and volunteers. When we visited the Embarras River Basin Agency, Outreach Worker Shelly Andrews was quick to point out how much their clients care about each other. **"Our commodities distribution is about more than food. The people who use our pantry are knitted together and if someone doesn't show up, others are concerned. They often come early and sit and talk. The only time they see each other is right here. It is kind of like a family."**

In this newsletter you'll find stories from our travels across eastern Illinois. We hope you appreciate hearing from volunteers, reading client stories and learning how we all work together to alleviate hunger. We will continue these "touches" in our region as we reach out to our communities to collect the stories of success and caring and represent you in our fight against hunger. **The other caring thread is you.** Your support strengthens the fabric of the Foodbank as it stretches across 14,500 square miles of eastern Illinois.

Thank you.

Jim Hires
President & CEO



HAVING A HEART FOR HUNGER continued from page 1

“

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”

had one of those since I was a kid. Could I take one?” Shelly offered him the whole pack, but he refused. “No,” he said, “Save that for someone with kids. **I’d be happy with just a couple.**” For Shelly, the relationships between the pantry clients are as important as the food. **“The people who use our pantry are knitted together ... it is kind of like a family.”**

For Kiki Brown of the Salvation Army in Bloomington, it’s about being committed to enacting change in her community through providing those in need with necessities. She sees a lot of younger clients come to the food pantry, many of whom are striving to improve their lives. She remembers a young woman who started coming to the pantry after receiving a raise at work. The higher wages were just enough to raise her above the income threshold for receiving food benefits but not enough for her to afford groceries each week. “She was ecstatic for the raise,” Kiki says. **“But she was stuck in the middle and needed help.”**

In Vermilion County, Nancy O’Kane at the St. Vincent DePaul Society Food Pantry in Danville is passionate about understanding and caring for clients. She tells the story of a gentleman who used to come to the pantry with a broken cart that he would push all around Danville in the summer months as he cut people’s lawns. “It only had three wheels,” she recalls. She and the other volunteers purchased him a new cart so that he could transport more easily throughout town. **“Our community is very generous and we are very appreciative,”** Nancy says. **“It is a struggle for many and we are able to lighten that load.”**

With food from Eastern Illinois Foodbank and the ingenuity of food pantry workers and volunteers, our partner agencies are helping eastern Illinois residents fill their plates and improve their lives. We couldn’t help but be inspired by the strength and resiliency of the clients and the genuine compassion of the food pantry workers and volunteers. They all truly encompass what it means to have a heart for hunger.



MEET EIF BOARD MEMBER: TERRY THIES



Terry Thies’ involvement with Eastern Illinois Foodbank began in 2012 when she chaired Lawyers Feeding Illinois, a yearlong, state-wide campaign conducted by the Illinois State Bar Association that supported all regional food banks in Illinois. “As a chair, I had the privilege of working very closely with EIF and its staff and was impressed with the work EIF was doing locally,” Terry recalls. Seeing the impact EIF has had on our community increased her determination to be part of such an important mission. Since working on the Lawyers Feeding Illinois campaign, Terry has

appreciated the opportunity to devote more time and partner with EIF as she works on local efforts to end hunger. “It is a privilege to be a board member and support the work of EIF at repacks, various food distributions and other events.” Terry finds working at foodmobiles especially impactful since it allows an opportunity to directly put food into the hands of the people who need it. **“I love being able to connect with the people at a foodmobile or one of the distribution events and be a friendly face,”** she says. **“I always want people to walk away feeling supported by EIF.”**

“I want to see a day when our neighbors no longer worry about whether they will have food on their table. Through EIF, I can serve people in our community, come alongside them and offer support.”

RETIREE USES CREATIVE TALENTS TO GIVE BACK

Tom Degler first became familiar with food banking when he lived in Geneva, Illinois. Growing up on a farm in central Illinois and working in the agriculture industry for most of his career, Degler wanted to learn more about food insecurity in his local community. He reached out to his local food bank for answers and was surprised to discover that people who worked and donated to the Foodbank also used their services when they fell on hard times. **"It can happen to anyone when they get in a pinch."**

When Degler retired in 2008, he began looking for something to give his retirement a sense of purpose. His wife had tasked him with filling the bird feeder in their yard, and soon Degler began researching, experimenting and building squirrel-proof bird feeders. Before he knew it, he had launched a business called *SquirrelAway Bird Café*.



Degler's business was a success, but he was not interested in supplementing his retirement income. For him, the feeders were a hobby and not a job.

Degler came up with the concept of "Fool a Squirrel, Feed a Family" and began donating the proceeds from his bird feeder sales to Northern Illinois Foodbank, near his home in Geneva. To him, it made sense. Degler explains, "the SquirrelAway Bird Café fools the squirrel by not letting him get to that expensive bird feed, while the profits in the sale of the 'Café' go to the Foodbank to feed families." The profit from one bird feeder generates \$10-\$12, which the Foodbank can leverage to provide 50-60 meals.



generating thousands of dollars of support for Eastern Illinois Foodbank in the last few years. Degler strongly encourages other retirees to use their hobbies to benefit local non-profits. His advice is **"DO IT!"**

Over the last 9 years, he has built and sold more than 5,000 feeders. As for why he continues to support the Foodbank, Degler explains, **"Having enough to eat is something we take for granted, but not everyone has that luxury. What better place to give back than that."**

You can find more information about his feeders at www.squirrelproof.biz.

DAY OF GIVING 2018 RAISES 420,000 MEALS

Despite the frigid temperatures and snow showers, **Day of Giving 2018 was a huge success with over 420,000 meals raised to feed those in need!** Donors, volunteers, EIF staff, and board members braved

the elements at three donation collection sites on November 27 to help us **"stick a fork in hunger."** Presenting sponsors were WCIA and News-Gazette Media, with WCIA providing live broadcast of the event from their Champaign parking lot as well as in Danville and Charleston. In the weeks leading up to the event, several businesses, schools, and individuals throughout our service area held food drives to contribute to the event. We are so grateful for the generosity of everyone who donated and helped make Day of Giving such a success, including all the communities that came together for a great cause. **Special thank you to WCIA for the incredible support. We look forward to another successful Day of Giving in 2019!**



11th Annual

PROM BENEFIT

presented by Jackson Chiropractic
March 9, 2019

54

STUDIO

Eastern Illinois
FOODBANK

This year's annual Prom Benefit will recreate the decadence and glamour of Studio 54 as attendees dance the night away for a good cause. **The event will take place on March 9, 2019 from 7-11pm at the Hilton Garden Inn with a goal of raising 625,000 meals for our neighbors in need.** Co-chair Tiffany Jackson of title sponsor Jackson Chiropractic explains how the event offers the opportunity to support those in need. "Being born and raised in Champaign-Urbana I never understood the magnitude of the need for services provided by the Eastern Illinois Foodbank and how the need grows every year," she says. **"The Prom Benefit helps others understand the importance of the Foodbank and impact that their donation can make on their local communities all while giving us the opportunity to get dressed up and have a night out."**

More information on this year's Prom Benefit can be found on our website at eifoodbank.org/prombenefit