

INSIDE SCOOP



Eastern Illinois Foodbank Provides Hope During Uncertain Times

In a matter of days, the coronavirus (COVID-19) changed the landscape of the entire country. School closures meant many families would no longer have access to free or reduced-cost lunches and shelter-at-home orders closed many businesses, causing unemployment claims to rise. As uncertainty weaved itself into the fabric of our daily lives, grocery store shelves became barren and a fog of uneasiness hovered in the atmosphere. But in the face of adversity, Eastern Illinois Foodbank and our partners have been stepping up to provide food — and hope — to a community that needs it now more than ever.

More than 100,000 people in our community rely on Eastern Illinois Foodbank for food and, as the pandemic intensifies, they are at even greater risk for missing meals. In the two weeks following Illinois' shelter-at-home order, EIF's partner agencies reported serving 822 new households and 2,328 new individuals — and that trend is expected to continue.

The lead researcher for Feeding America's Map the Meal Gap study predicts the number of Americans struggling with food insecurity could continue to increase over the next two years.

But the resiliency of the human spirit persists and the Foodbank quickly adapted to meet the challenges ahead. On March 28, EIF held a supplemental drive-through food distribution in Tilton for Vermilion County residents. Clients remained in their cars and drove from station to station, where volunteers loaded food directly into their vehicles

to avoid contact. In under two hours, more than 1,100 individuals were served, nearly half of whom were new clients. One patron expressed gratitude for how well-organized the distribution was. Another was glad the distribution allowed people with limited mobility to easily get the food they need: **"This is really great, especially for seniors who are having trouble walking."** A disabled veteran shared his **thankfulness and commented that the food will really help.** In the week following the distribution, the Foodbank had already begun planning another one, and staff began packing an additional 500 emergency food boxes to be distributed the next weekend.

EIF's partner agencies have also been eager to get food to people who need it during these uncertain times. **"We are seeing an increased need," Jeff Saunders of the Arcola Food Pantry said,** adding that they have seen some new patrons they had never seen at the pantry before. They had to make adjustments to their distributions in order to continue serving clients safely, including distributing pre-made boxes of food, wearing gloves and keeping as much distance as possible between volunteers. **"We're just trying to go with the flow," he said. "As we find out what we need to do, we're trying to implement it."**

Johnell Bentz, manager of Jubilee Café CUCC, said they had to change their distributions from serving meals restaurant-style to giving patrons to-go bags filled mostly with non-perishable items. "It's really important for us to get food out to those who need it," she said.

Continued on back



Jeff Saunders of the Arcola Food Pantry picks up food from the EIF warehouse.



EIF staff load boxes of food into cars at a drive-through distribution in Tilton.

2020 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Terry Thies, Board Chair

Youth Program Manager, Parkland College

Marc A. Bralts, Vice Chair

Owner/Operator, Einstein Bros. Bagels

Terri A. Daniels, Secretary

Business Administrative Associate,
University of Illinois

Wade Hoey, Treasurer

Supervisor, Martin, Hood, Friese

Alan Cook

Rabbi, Sinai Temple

George Czapar

Retired, University of Illinois Extension

Anne Dill

Senior Vice President, Director of Private
Client, Busey Wealth Management

Nancy Greenwalt

Executive Director, Promise Healthcare

Austin Hogue

Senior Project Engineer,
Broeren-Russo Builders, Inc

Matthew Kramer

Attorney, Jimmy John's Gourmet Sandwiches

Patricia Lewis

Retired, Champaign Unit 4 Schools

Edward Scopel

Architect, Ratio Architects

Ramona Sullivan

Attorney, Champaign County

Angelica W. Wawrzynek

Attorney, Armstrong, Grove & Wawrzynek

Jim Hires, Ex-Officio

President & CEO, Eastern Illinois Foodbank

CONTACT US

Eastern Illinois Foodbank
2405 North Shore Drive
Urbana, IL 61802-7221
(217) 328-3663

www.eifoodbank.org



Eastern Illinois
FOODBANK



THE HIRES REPORT



As I try to summarize Eastern Illinois Foodbank's efforts since the Coronavirus entered all of our lives this spring, I keep pondering this quote:

“

Continuity gives us roots; change give us branches, letting us stretch and grow and reach new heights. -Pauline Kezer

”

In a few short weeks, the Foodbank and our network of partner agencies have transformed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Pantries and feeding programs have adopted new food distribution methods to keep staff, volunteers and clients safe. Our statewide organization, Feeding Illinois, worked with the Illinois Broadcaster's Association to promote a telethon that raised funds for foodbanks across the state. A new partner in Danville offered us space to hold our first drive-through mobile food distribution.

But as our world turned upside down, one thing remained constant — people's desire to help. Thank you to everyone who has volunteered, provided financial support or simply offered words of encouragement.

The need ahead is great. Our network of pantries and feeding programs have already seen a sharp increase in requests for assistance. As individuals lose hours at work or are furloughed or laid off from their jobs, they are turning to us for emergency food assistance.

This virus has required rapid change, but the Foodbank is still doing what we've done for more than three decades — providing food and support for our agency partners so they can distribute food to those in need. **You've given us roots. We are growing new branches. With your support we will stretch and reach new heights.**

Jim Hires

Jim Hires
President & CEO

Eastern Illinois Foodbank and Ag Community Team Up with Harvest for Hunger

Eastern Illinois Foodbank is teaming up with the local agricultural community to fight hunger. Harvest for Hunger is an initiative that allows local farmers to ensure their community is fed by donating a portion of their crop proceeds directly to the Foodbank through their local elevator or co-op. All of the funds will remain in the local communities where the donations are made.



Scott Bidner, a 5th generation farmer, is stepping up to support Harvest for Hunger.

“Premier and our valued members are quite proud of our relationship with the Eastern Illinois Foodbank. They are dedicated to addressing such an important issue facing the communities we serve – food insecurity,” said Robert Carlson, CEO of Premier Cooperative. “Our 3,000 members have dedicated their lives to feeding the world and the valued partnership with Eastern Illinois Foodbank ensures such efforts begin at home.”

Hunger is not just an urban issue. Per the latest Feeding America Map the Meal Gap data, the child food insecurity rate in counties such as Vermilion, Ford, Clark, Edgar and Coles are all higher than both Cook County and the state average.

The COVID-19 crisis could also impact food accessibility in rural locations for groups like seniors. Shana Bailliez from the Atwood Area Food Pantry says that a concern they face is that when local discount stores run low on supplies or food, older populations may have to travel further to get resources, or rely on food pantries that are closer to home. The assistance from EIF and our partners is critical during these uncertain times.

HARVEST — FOR — HUNGER

Harvest for Hunger provides farmers the opportunity to make a real difference where they live and farm. By providing food

for their neighbors struggling with hunger, they can strengthen their communities and make an impact on rural food insecurity.

12th Annual Prom Benefit Raises 640,000 Meals

On March 7, superheroes united at the Hilton Garden Inn with one common goal — destroying food insecurity in eastern Illinois. Guests arrived to the Bruce Wayne black-tie affair ready to discover their alter egos and hunger-fighting superpowers to celebrate the 12th annual Prom Benefit. Attendees enjoyed dancing, hors d'oeuvres, drinks, raffle prizes, a silent auction and a paddle raise all to raise money for Eastern Illinois Foodbank.

By the end of the evening, the event raised more than \$128,000, which is the equivalent of 640,000 meals to help feed those struggling with food insecurity in eastern Illinois.

This year's prom court candidates included members of the community who raised more than \$52,000 to benefit Eastern Illinois Foodbank. Each dollar raised by a candidate equaled one vote, with Mitch Wilson and Jessica Hogue being crowned the Elite Bridal Prom King & Queen.

“The Foodbank is a great organization with a great mission. I like the idea of being able to contribute to a great cause while having some friendly competition amongst the court,” Mitch Wilson said. “To know that I was able to contribute over \$13,000, or more than 65,000 meals, is very humbling.”

If you or your business would like to be involved with Prom Benefit 2021, please contact our Development department at 217-328-3663 or email marketing@eifoodbank.org.



First row L-R: King Mitch Wilson, Queen Jessica Hogue; Second row L-R: Vilma Howard, Danny Iniguez, Katy Behnke, Nicole Howell, Julia Rietz, Joanna Smith

BOARD SPOTLIGHT: **AUSTIN HOGUE**

Austin Hogue was first introduced to Eastern Illinois Foodbank through the United Way's Emerging Community Leaders Program, when he volunteered at a Foodmobile distribution. He encountered a young woman with two small children who pulled up in her work uniform. Austin assisted her by loading her food into her vehicle.



"She looked at me with tears in her eyes and expressed her thankfulness," he recalls. "I could see that for the time being, her food insecurity burden had been lifted." He reflects that seeing her situation changed his perspective on food insecurity in our community. Serving on the EIF Board of Directors has allowed Austin the opportunity to continue to serve our community and work to alleviate food insecurity. **"I believe no one should go hungry and that food should be available to everyone in their time of need,"** he says. **He encourages others to get involved with the Foodbank by volunteering or donating. "There is more than one way to help,"** he says. **"Visit eifoodbank.org for more information on making a monetary, volunteer or food donation."**



Feed 365

Our community needs our help now more than ever. You can provide a sustainable platform from which Eastern Illinois Foodbank can serve those struggling with hunger in our community year round. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, Feeding America

projects the food insecurity rate in our country could increase significantly over the next two years. When you become a recurring monthly donor, you can provide a strong, reliable source of support for single parents, children, seniors and working families. Eastern Illinois Foodbank's Feed 365 program allows you to provide year-round help to allow EIF to meet the increased need in our community.

Just visit eifoodbank.org, click "Donate" and select "Make this donation recurring" to provide food — and hope — 365 days a year!

Eastern Illinois Foodbank Provides Hope During Uncertain Times continued

Charlie Brown of Daily Bread Soup Kitchen said they've also had to change their distributions to a to-go model. **"Our numbers have been pretty consistent, even with this outbreak,"** he said. **"We're still moving along, it's just we've had to make some changes to ensure our safety and also the safety of our guests."**

And while the situation can feel overwhelming at times, Shana Baillez from the Atwood Area Food Pantry had some reassuring advice. "Planning and preparation prevents panic," she said, "and we can get food to everyone who needs it."

It's that buoyancy that holds communities together in times of crisis. With the support of our community, the Foodbank and our network of partners have been working tirelessly to ensure that our neighbors in need have the food they need to survive these unprecedented times. In the words of a supporter, "You are showing us what it means to be a community that takes care of all its members. Thank you for your hard work."

We're all in this together, and Eastern Illinois Foodbank will continue to adapt as often as the challenges before us require. The strength of a community comes from its people, and EIF will continue to provide food and support to keep our community strong.