Celebrating our Northwest Center
Senior Grocery Market turns one

Winnebago Community Market opens
Closing the meal gap in the Rockford area
Dear Friends,

2017 was a great year of growth for us at Northern Illinois Food Bank. Together, we made strides toward solving hunger in our communities. Because of you, we are expanding our reach and providing more neighbors with the nutritious food they need (and deserve) to thrive in the year ahead.

The theme of growth will ring true for the Food Bank and our feeding partners throughout 2018, as we are launching several exciting initiatives. You’ll hear more about each of these initiatives in issues of The Full Plate throughout 2018.

With that in mind, we kick off the first Full Plate of 2018 by celebrating programs at our Northwest Center in Rockford. February marks the first anniversary of our Senior Grocery Market (SGM) and the unveiling of a new county-wide program, the Winnebago Community Market (WCM).

In the SGM’s wildly successful inaugural year, which served more than 5,600 of our senior neighbors, Read on to learn more about the SGM’s impact in the Rockford area, and our future vision for this exciting new program.

Also in this issue, you’ll read the story of Ralph and Linda—a Rockford couple for whom the Senior Grocery Market program has been the difference between paying bills or having a meal on the table. Their story brings to light the tough choices so many seniors are faced with—whether to fill a prescription, turn on the heat or buy food. Your continued support means we can ensure that our seniors have regular access to healthy, balanced meals, which couldn’t be more important during these cold, winter months when it’s even more difficult to stay healthy and stave off seasonal sickness like the flu. It’s these choices and factors that motivate us to work tirelessly day in and day out—we know there is enough nutritious food to feed every neighbor, every meal, every day in every community. I’m sure you agree that our precious neighbors deserve better than the worry of an empty stomach.

Friends like YOU help fill empty plates all year long, and for that, we thank you. Thank you for believing in our mission, and for supporting our goal to build healthy communities—one neighbor, one meal at a time. Your helping hands and financial investments truly make all the difference.

Warmly,

Julia Yurko
President and CEO

The exciting year ahead

Volunteer in Rockford

Helping Hands Needed: Direct Service Opportunities

We need volunteer year-round to help feed our hungry neighbors at all of our Centers, but you can also serve your neighbors directly through one of the programs below! Visit our website at SolveHungerToday.org/DirectService to learn more and sign up for an upcoming shift.

Senior Grocery Market
1st and 3rd Thursday of every month (and 5th Thursday, when applicable)
8:00am-12:00pm
15-25 volunteers needed per Market

Mobile Pantry Program
At-needed basis; dates and volunteer form vary
Call to inquire about upcoming mobile volunteer opportunities
15-25 volunteers needed per Market

Winnebago Community Market
2nd and 4th Thursday of every month
8:00am-12:00pm
15-25 volunteers needed per Market

Northern Illinois Food Bank is working toward solving hunger in Northern Illinois for our neighbors in need. Look for the following icons throughout this issue of The Full Plate accompanying stories that highlight the five pillars of our strategic plan:

Provide More Meals
Ignite the Community
Build Healthy Communities
Strengthen Leadership
Be Trusted Financial Stewards

Ralph & Linda’s Story

A first glance, Ralph and Linda (ages 74 and 69, respectively) appear to be exact opposites. He is tall and quick to deliver a joke, while she is shorter and more serious. But beyond appearance, this husband-and-wife pair is united in their love for their family – and their gratitude for how Northern Illinois Food Bank’s Senior Grocery Market is making a difference in their lives.

After first hearing about the Senior Grocery Market word of mouth, Ralph and Linda started coming to Northern Illinois Food Bank’s Rockford branch in September 2017 to take part in the bi-monthly distributions. Longtime residents of Rockford, they live just a few minutes away with Linda’s grown children (a son and daughter; ages 45 and 43) and sixteen-year-old granddaughter, Maggie. Ralph, whose background is in theatre and publicity, shares that he first came to the city with NBC as a film and art director, and had an extensive career as a communications professional.

“I worked for almost every major industry in Rockford, and here I am at a food bank,” he says. “What in the dickens?!”

Although the idea of needing help in order to put food on the table has been an adjustment, both Ralph and Linda are extremely thankful for the assistance they have found at the Food Bank’s Senior Grocery Market, and are impressed by the efficiency of the program.

“I’m amazed at how well this whole operation goes!” Ralph says, gesturing to the volunteers and clients surrounding them in the warehouse. “I feel comfortable here. Not threatened. Not intimidated, and not embarrassed.” They are also glad to see such a broad selection of foods available to choose from. “I like the variety,” Linda says. “The meat, that’s a biggie—especially beef. I use all of it—I cook from scratch.”

When asked how the food they take home helps with their budget and current resources, the reply is immediate. “We eat!” Ralph quips lightheartedly with a roguish grin and a wink. When Linda smiles at his arm, he continues more seriously. “It’s a blessing.”

Linda explains that although they receive SNAP benefits each month, the total amount was significantly reduced just recently, thus coming to the Senior Grocery Market allows them to get nutritious groceries without putting an added burden on their already strapped budget.

As they near the end of the line, Linda adds a head of lettuce to the basket of the shopping cart. Ralph surveys the contents of the cart with a smile. “It’s hard being on the downward slope,” he says, “I’m not used to that. [So] it’s extremely helpful.”

Senior grocery market serves multigenerational family

Ralph and Linda visit the Senior Grocery Market at the Food Bank’s Northwest Center in Rockford to help make ends meet.

www.SolveHungerToday.org
Introducing: Winnebago Community Market

With the success of the Senior Market in mind, we knew there was more work to be done in order to effectively serve the larger Winnebago County community as a whole. Thus, the idea for the Winnebago Community Market was born.

And on February 8, 2018, just days after the first anniversary of the Senior Market, the Food Bank hosted its first Winnebago Market distribution, serving 266 neighbors. Also held at the Food Bank’s Northwest Center, the Winnebago Market follows the same model as the Senior Market and maintains the same focus on providing a safe, stigma-free place for hungry neighbors to get access to nutritious, healthy foods, but is open to all residents of Winnebago County.

“We want [the Winnebago Market] to be an example of what we want all our agencies to eventually be like,” said Sharon McNeil, Manager of Healthy Community Programs at Northern Illinois Food Bank. McNeil notes the main difference between the two Market programs is that the Winnebago Market will focus more on meeting the need of the entire household, rather than just the senior population. “We know many of our clients are coming from multigenerational families,” McNeil says. “So while it will take some time to figure out how to best serve these families, at the end of the day we want to be sure we’re providing enough meals to feed the whole household.”

The Winnebago Market will be held on opposite weeks of the Senior Market in order to offer everyone in the community two opportunities per month to get the food they need. The ultimate goal of the Winnebago Market’s pilot phase is to be open for longer hours and include a permanent, pantry-style space within the Northwest Center in order to serve our neighbors on a more frequent basis, McNeil said.

“I thought it was a very worthwhile cause,” Ralph & Linda said. “Since retiring, I’ve been looking to keep myself busy, and when a friend introduced me to the Food Bank, I decided to volunteer. I enjoy helping them learn.”

Ralph & Linda’s Story

For this issue of The Full Plate, we sat down with Stu Meyerson, a four-year volunteer and Volunteer Supervisor at our Northwest Center in Rockford, to learn more about what inspired him to help hungry neighbors.

Tell us a little about yourself.

I grew up in New York City, where I went to college and became an engineer. I’m now retired and live with my significant other, Kathy, and have two children and two grandchildren. I spend my time volunteering at several organizations in the Rockford area.

Why did you decide to get involved with the Food Bank?

Since retiring, I’ve been looking to keep myself busy, and when a friend introduced me to the Food Bank, I thought it was a very worthwhile cause.

What do you like most about the Food Bank?

One of my favorite things is the Senior Grocery Market. It’s rewarding to help seniors who can’t afford groceries on a fixed income. My other favorite thing is helping provide special needs high school groups with a day service.

Tell us a fun fact about yourself.

In addition to the Food Bank, I also volunteer during tax season with Goodwill of Northern Illinois as a quality reviewer, helping low-income folks and seniors ensure their taxes are done correctly before filing them. I am also on the board of the Rockford Area Habitat for Humanity, and serve as a volunteer construction site supervisor during build season. Lastly, I’m a board member and RSVIP (Retired Senior Volunteer Program) at Rock Valley Credit Union, which receives federal grant money to further help others in the Rockford community. For each of the last two years, I gave them over 1,000 hours of service.

The Senior Grocery Market and Winnebago Community Market programs are made possible by generous donations. Contact Hester Bury at hbury@northernilfoodbank.org to make a donation to these or other Food Bank programs. For volunteer opportunities, email volunteer@northernilfoodbank.org for upcoming dates and shifts.

Byline: Stu Meyerson, Volunteer Supervisor

www.SolveHungerToday.org
We need volunteers year round in our warehouses to help pack food. Contact our Volunteer Team at volunteer@northernilfoodbank.org to sign up for a volunteer shift today!

Last year, the Food Bank welcomed more than 25,000 volunteers who donated more than 136,000 hours of time to solving hunger—equivalent to 65 additional staff!

Foodie 5Ks return for a 5th year of fun!

Fitness experts agree that the best way to stay motivated is to set goals and mix up your work-out routine. Training for one—or all three—of this year’s Foodie 5Ks can help you stay on track and provide a change of venue, all while helping feed hungry neighbors right here in your hometown.

The Foodie 5K returns to three unique Chicagoland locations in 2018 in Wheaton, Libertyville, and Romeoville to benefit Northern Illinois Food Bank. Featuring a post-race festival with entertainment, gourmet food trucks and activities for kids, the Foodie 5K appeals to everyone from serious runners to stroller-pushing parents to food lovers looking for a nice stroll. Registration for all three races is open at www.solvehungertoday.org/foodie5k.

The fun begins April 7 in DuPage County when the Foodie 5K returns to the scenic grounds of Cantigny Park in Wheaton. The scene shifts to Lake County for a trail run on May 12 when the Foodie 5K returns to Independence Grove Forest Preserve in Libertyville. Then on September 15, the Foodie 5K rolls into Will County for a grass trail run at Lewis University in Romeoville.

Now in its fifth year, the Foodie 5K attracted nearly 2,500 participants and raised more than $209,000 last year to support Northern Illinois Food Bank’s efforts of solving hunger in our community by providing nutritious food for 71,500 hungry neighbors each week.

“We are so excited for the Foodie 5K to be returning to DuPage, Lake and Will Counties after a great outpouring of support last year,” said Kate Thomas, Special Events Coordinator at Northern Illinois Food Bank. “These races offer a fun and interactive way for people to engage with Northern Illinois Food Bank’s message, and to help give back right in their own communities.”

All proceeds from the Foodie 5K benefit Northern Illinois Food Bank, which provides food to hungry neighbors each week through a network of more than 800 community food pantries and feeding programs across its 13-county service area. Every $1 donated to the Food Bank provides $8 worth of groceries for those in need, and 97 percent of the Food Bank’s resources support programs that provide nutritious food to families and individuals in need.

All three Foodie 5Ks are chip-timed fun runs/walks open to all ages. All registered participants will receive a shirt, a $2 food truck voucher to be used at the post-race festival and more. Participants who register for all three races will receive a special commemorative gift. Registration for each race is $35 for adults and $15 for children ages 6-12. Children ages 0-5 are free. Volunteer and sponsorship opportunities are available at all three race locations. Visit www.solvehungertoday.org/foodie5k for more information.

Register today at www.solvehungertoday.org/foodie5k

Northwest Center Volunteers

We need volunteers—year round—in our warehouses to help pack food. Interested in volunteering at the Northwest Center? Contact volunteer@northernilfoodbank.org to sign up for a volunteer shift today!

Last year, the Food Bank welcomed more than 25,000 volunteers who donated more than 136,000 hours of time to solving hunger—equivalent to 65 additional staff!

Direct service volunteering opportunities like the Senior Grocery Market and Winnebago Community Market are available every Thursday at the Northwest Center. Sign up through our online calendar today!
Upcoming Activities

See our complete calendar of events at www.SolveHungerToday.org

A TASTE THAT MATTERS

presented by Jewel Osco.

Thursday, May 17
6 p.m.
Drury Lane, Oakbrook Terrace

The Food Bank’s premiere event of the year returns to Drury Lane for a 7th year of entertainment, food tastings from some of Chicagoland’s finest restaurants, and an extensive silent auction all to benefit hungry neighbors across Northern Illinois. For information on sponsorship opportunities or to purchase tickets, visit www.SolveHungerToday.org/A TasteThatMatters, or contact Kate Thomas at 630-443-8910 ext. 117 or kthomas@northernilfoodbank.org.

SAVE THE DATE FOR OUR 2018 EVENTS!

APRIL
Foodie 5K Wheaton
Saturday, April 7 – 9 a.m.
Cantigny Park, Wheaton
See article on page 6. To register or learn more, visit www.SolveHungerToday.org/Foodie5K.

MAY
Foodie 5K Lake County
Saturday, May 12 – 9 a.m.
Independence Grove, Libertyville
See article on page 6. To register or learn more, visit www.SolveHungerToday.org/Foodie5K.

AUGUST
20th Annual Hunger Scramble
Tuesday, August 21 – 8:30 a.m.
Cantigny Golf, Wheaton
Join us for a day on the green at our 20th annual Hunger Scramble golf outing. Enjoy scenic views as well as on-course tastings and giveaways, a 19th-hole awards reception, and silent auction and raffle prizes.

Follow us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn to find out the latest happenings at the Food Bank
Send comments/questions about articles in this issue to communications@northernilfoodbank.org