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FROM THE PRESIDENT

Happy Harvest, Happy Holidays

D ear Friends,

As another holiday season settles in, I’ve been thinking a lot about our harvest season. Every year, when farmers across the Midwest take to their fields and gardens to harvest a bountiful crop, we’re blessed with corn, soy beans, pumpkins, squash and so much more that fill our plates and our bellies. But for many of our neighbors, it can be a struggle to fill their plates and bellies with the same nutritious produce we enjoy this time of year. Sadly, this only becomes more difficult as the holidays get closer and our neighbors’ budgets are stretched even further.

Remembering Sister Rosemarie

W e’re incredibly saddened to share that Northern Illinois Food Bank founder, Sister Rosemarie Burian, passed away in late September. During a morning meditation in May 1982, Sister Rosemarie had a vision that she would have a food bank – believing that every person deserves access to food in Lake County, an area where we’re currently focused on doing even more.

I hope in reading these stories you’ll be as inspired as I am! And I hope you know that because of you—our donors, supporters, and partners—that we are making the holiday season brighter for those we serve, and ensuring they too can enjoy the holidays with their loved ones.

Thank you for the essential part you play in solving hunger in Northern Illinois, and for doing what matters for our neighbors in need today and every day.

Wishing you the happiest of holidays,

Julie Yurko
President and CEO

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

W e met Lisa one Monday evening at North Point Church in Winthrop Harbor, where a twice-monthly food pantry invites neighbors to pick up groceries. Leaning against the wall, Lisa waits patiently for her turn to shop. Her dark auburn hair is pushed over one shoulder, and a kind, gentle smile is her most noticeable feature.

She has been coming to the food pantry on and off for nearly two years. After an accident left her unable to continue the job she loved as a third grade teacher, Lisa now has to rely on the pantry as her main source of nutritious food.

“I like healthy food,” she says. “I’m disabled, so I’m unable to work or go out and buy the foods that I need to be healthy. [But] this pantry gives you a lot of vegetables, which is amazing.”

She also appreciates the variety of meat, as it alleviates a significant strain on her grocery budget—and after her SNAP benefits were slashed to a mere $15 per month, that grocery budget is much tighter than before. “It’s devastating,” she says. “It’s a huge difference. Thank God for this place.”

The vegetables and meat Lisa picks up from the pantry are put to immediate use at home, making their way into stir fries, quinoa meals, and slow cookers.

“Nothing goes to waste,” she says, sharing that in addition to eating produce items fresh, she will often freeze, dehydrate, or juice them.

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With help from the food pantry, Lisa is able to make ends meet more easily. “Eating three meals a day is amazing,” she says with her ever-present smile. “[The pantry] makes a big difference, it really does.”

As the holidays approach, Lisa is even more thankful for the food she brings home. “If I have family over – this is my chance. If I don’t get something here, I probably won’t have something to offer at Christmas,” she explains. Her parting words, as she makes her way toward the tables laden with produce, shelf-stable items, and what looks like dessert, are simple, and sum up the holiday spirit in two sentences: “Thank you. What else can you say besides thank you?”

Lisa’s Story

Lisa, a single mother of four, has been coming to the food pantry for over one year. As the holidays approach, Lisa is even more thankful for the food she brings home.

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Feeding neighbors from field to fork

Farm and agriculture partners donate crops to make a difference

Northern Illinois Food Bank is dedicated to providing nutritious meals to all of our neighbors in need – and we know that fruits and vegetables in particular are key to a healthy, balanced diet. That’s why 23 percent of the food we distribute throughout our 13-county service area is produce. Last year alone, that percentage totaled 14.9 million pounds of fresh produce – more than 90 percent of which was donated. As a food bank located in the heart of the Midwest, we’re fortunate to have an abundance of agricultural products grown right here in Northern Illinois, and often benefit from donations of surplus produce from our farm and agriculture partners. While these contributions range from zucchini to potatoes, sweet corn to tomatoes, and everything in between, the common denominator is that this donated produce provides meals to neighbors in need who might not otherwise be able to access enough healthy and nutritious foods.

One longstanding partner the Food Bank has in the farm and agriculture industry is the Growing Initiative, based in McHenry County. Since 2009, the Growing Initiative has planted and harvested crops on approximately 20 acres of land each year in Marengo. These crops are hand-picked by volunteers, loaded into semi trailers, and transported straight from the field to our neighbors’ forks via the Food Bank and our network of more than 900 food pantries, soup kitchens and feeding program sites.

“The goal is simple: let’s figure out how to source fresh, first-run produce at the most economical results we can get,” says Jim Origer, founder of the Growing Initiative. “This is something [people] can really understand. I’m picking this food so that someone who’s hungry can eat it.”

Over the past five years, the Growing Initiative has donated more than 422,000 pounds of produce to the Food Bank – mainly sweet corn, but with the occasional squash harvest as well – resulting in more than 352,000 meals to neighbors in need. “People are good – [they] want to have an opportunity to help,” Origer explains. “[This] is a collaboration of people coming together. It takes very little land to create a lot of food and to do a lot of good.”

Another farm and agriculture partner that demonstrates the power of people coming together is Sweet Corn for Charity, Part of the Chicago-based Agri Heritage Foundation, Sweet Corn for Charity annually

Top Produce Donors

(Grown & Agriculture category; in order of pounds donated)

July 2014 – June 2019

DeGeart’s Vegetable Farms
Get Fresh Produce, Inc. Mighty Mile
Feeding Washington
Gumz Muck Farms LLC
Lower Midwest Regional Produce
Farmer’s Choice USA

www.SolveHungerToday.org

In this issue of The Full Plate, we feature community Food Bank partner, Lake County Community Foundation. We spoke with Emily Wuckert, Manager of Community Leadership & Investment, to learn why they love being part of the Food Bank family.

1. How long has the Lake County Community Foundation been a supporter of the Food Bank?

The Foundation is currently in the last year of a three-year initiative with the Food Bank and Liberty Prairie Foundation to coordinate Lake County’s food system and increase access to fresh, affordable food in underserved communities. The organizations have worked closely together over the last three years to find innovative ways to provide food education, bring healthy food to communities in need, and support pantries and other groups working to feed their communities.

2. How did you first hear about us, and why did you decide to get involved?

The Food Bank has long been an invaluable resource to Lake County as it works to feed our communities and hungry neighbors. Given the Food Bank’s high capacity and dedication to the work, we knew they would be the perfect partner for our initiative to address access to fresh, affordable food in Lake County.

3. What is the best part of partnering with the Food Bank?

We are continually struck by the dedication and innovation of the Food Bank team and its food pantry agency partners. They come up with creative solutions and strategies to fight hunger in our communities.
AROUND THE FOOD BANK

207 golfers joined us on August 27 to make our 21st Annual Hunger Scramble, presented by West Suburban Bank, one to remember!

In September, we hosted Pack-a-thons at all four of our centers in Geneva, Joliet, Park City, and Rockford.

With your help, we raised $15,000 which helps provide $90,000 worth of groceries. Thank you for doing what matters for our neighbors in need.

Volunteers of all ages contributed their time and efforts to helping make sure our neighbors in need have the nutritious food they need to stay healthy.

In total, we packed over 109,000 pounds of food – more than 90,000 meals worth – of zucchini, squash, apples, onions, potatoes, and canned veggies!

With the help of individuals and groups alike, 666 unique volunteers joined us during these special Hunger Action Month events.

www.SolveHungerToday.org
Upcoming Activities

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

MAXIMIZE YOUR IMPACT; MAKE A YEAR-END GIFT

There are many ways you can do what matters and support your hungry neighbors this holiday season!

AmazonSmile – Shop smile.amazon.com for all your Amazon shopping and select the Food Bank as your charity of choice to have 0.5% of your purchase price donated back to us!

Holiday Cards & Meals – Make the holidays bright for our neighbors and help put food on their table at the same time! Donate $10+ and get a specially-designed holiday card to gift that helps provide $80 worth of groceries, or donate $30 to help provide a complete Holiday Meal Box to a family in need.

Year-End Gifts – If you itemize your income tax return, make a gift by Dec. 31 to qualify for a tax benefit this year! This includes gifts made online, by check and other gifts such as stocks/securities, IRA distributions, donor-advised funds, and employer matching gifts. Contact Gina at ggramaroso@northernilfoodbank.org, or (630) 443-6910 ext. 130 to learn more about year-end gift options.

*For tax advice, please consult your personal tax professional.

SAVE THE DATE FOR OUR 2020 EVENTS!

FEBRUARY
Wills vs. Trusts, a workshop with Ted Kuczek
Thursday, February 13, 2020 | 6:00 p.m.
Northern Illinois Food Bank – West Suburban Center, Geneva

MARCH
A Cup of Hope: A Garden Tea to Solve Hunger
Sunday, March 1, 2020 | 1:30 p.m.
Embassy Suites Hotel, Naperville

APRIL
7th Annual Foodie 5K
Saturday, April 18, 2020 | 9:00 a.m.
Cantigny Park, Wheaton