

# **Blue Ridge Area Food Bank Network honored as top Food Bank in the nation**

*BRCC's Virginia Hunger Symposium receives national recognition as well*

**(April 7, 2009)** --- The Blue Ridge Area Food Bank Network announces today that it has received a national award for its outstanding hunger-relief efforts.

Of the 205 Feeding America food banks in the country, the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank Network was the selected recipient of the 2009 Feeding America Member of the Year award at the Feeding America Annual Conference last week. Over the course of 27 years, the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank Network has grown to support more than 400 agencies that serve nearly 130,000 unique individuals living in nine cities and 25 counties through the Lynchburg, Thomas Jefferson, Lord Fairfax and Shenandoah Valley branches.

Each year, Feeding America honors a member with the Member of the Year award for going beyond its core mission of feeding the hungry. As the food bank has grown, so has its capacity to raise funds, acquire nutritious food, and raise awareness of government programs to help feed more people in need. Last year, the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank Network distributed more than 10.8 million pounds of food — a 24 percent increase from the previous year.

“Chief Executive Officer Marty White and his staff at the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank are incredible assets to Feeding America,” said Vicki Escarra, President and CEO of Feeding America.

To ensure that a wide variety of food is available to its agencies, the food bank maintains an inventory level at which a minimum of 70 percent of the items are considered nutritious. Additionally, the organization pre-qualified more than 3,000 low-income individuals for food stamps.

In addition to receiving the honor of Member of the Year, Feeding America honored the Virginia Hunger Symposium as the Model Advocacy Program of the Year. The Virginia Hunger Symposium is a partnership between the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank Network and Blue Ridge Community College (BRCC).

“These awards are the culmination of a dedicated, passionate staff committed to seeing that none shall go hungry,” said CEO Marty White. “I am both humbled and honored to accept these prestigious awards on behalf of our Board, our staff, our many volunteers and community partners who dedicate themselves to feeding the hungry.”

Steve Brown, Chairman of the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank Network Board of Directors said: “We are very pleased that Feeding America has recognized the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank Network with these two prestigious awards. The vision to provide access to three nutritious meals a day for children and two nutritious meals a day for adults is what the Board and staff strive to achieve on a daily basis. While national recognition is always nice and very much appreciated, we have a long way to go in feeding the needy in our Network. We look forward to fulfilling our vision.”

Feeding America honored the Virginia Hunger Symposium as the Model Advocacy Program of the Year because of its outstanding demonstration of broad-based support among key audiences at the local level. The winning program or campaign also contains elements that can be replicated by other member food banks.

The Virginia Hunger Symposium is a four-day hunger education event founded by Dr. John Downey, VP of Instruction and Student Services at BRCC. The Symposium is geared toward engaging students in ways to fight hunger right in their own backyards. In 2008, the partnership expanded to include community colleges and food banks across Virginia. The event proved to be a success not only for the food bank, but for BRCC students as well. Most of the college faculty incorporated hunger education into their coursework throughout this event — allowing their students to walk away with a clear message of how they can play a role in ending hunger in their communities. As a result, the students donated everything from food and funds, to crock pots for one of the food bank's self-sufficiency programs, bringing in more than 4,000 pounds of food and more than \$4,000 dollars.

“By spreading the word to the public about hunger-related issues, our network takes one of the first steps toward ending hunger in America,” Escarra said. “The outstanding advocacy work of the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank Network demonstrates the leadership that our network strives for in our mission to feed America's hungry.”