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A NEWSLETTER OF THE BLUE RIDGE AREA FOOD BANK

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**BLUE RIDGE AREA  
FOOD BANK**

a member of  
**FEEDING  
AMERICA**

# Resilience

## A grateful family's story

For the first few years of her youngest son's life, Laura Fortune didn't work.

Rashad is autistic and the symptoms during his first few years were difficult to manage – particularly, his inability to communicate verbally. After Rashad was diagnosed with autism, Laura couldn't imagine sending him off to daycare each day.

"Not all people are equipped to handle children with special needs," she said. "So, I took care of him until he started school."

It was a sacrifice she readily made for the betterment of her son.

Times were tough in the Fortune household of five. They were surviving on her husband's income from a full-time job, and struggling to make every dollar stretch.

That's when Laura began to visit the food pantry at Madison Emergency Services Association (MESA). MESA is a partner agency of the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank and a significant amount of the food distributed at the pantry comes from the Food Bank.

Laura also became a dedicated volunteer at the pantry, lending a helping hand each time the pantry was open. It was a way for her to express her appreciation. Had it not been for the pantry, Laura said they would have gone without.

"A lot of our meals came from the pantry, during that time," she said. "Anything we received from the pantry was a blessing."

Rashad is now seven years old, and a running, jumping ball of energy. His

*"Sometimes we have to choose between paying the rent and buying food, and the pantry provides me with necessary foods that I can't always afford to buy." – Laura Fortune*

teachers call him "uniquely amazing." He's made outstanding progress, and while there are still challenging days, Laura said his communication skills surpass some others with his condition. He's an athlete and a gifted student—a member of the Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM) Club and a member of the LEGO Club.

*continued next page*

Laura recently went back to work as a full-time home health aide for an elderly couple, and her husband continues to work full time for an auto dealership. Her 20-year-old son, Cliff, is a football player in his second year at a Virginia university. Her 13-year-old daughter, Angel, is a cheerleader. Laura's life is a whirlwind; from work, to choir practice at her church, to attending Rashad's games, to volunteering—there's never a dull moment.

And while things are beginning to look up, there are months when the family still needs a boost from the pantry. The income she and her husband bring in isn't always enough to pay the bills and buy food.

"Sometimes we have to choose between paying the rent and buying food, and the pantry provides me with necessary foods that I can't always afford to buy," she said.

She's still volunteering one day a week, too; stopping in to help for a couple of hours after work.

"I've gotten so involved and I enjoy volunteering here. You meet so many different people from different walks of life," Laura said. "I'm just thankful. The people at the pantry are not here to look down on you. They're here to help you become the independent person you want to be."

## A Day in the Life



Photos, clockwise from the top: Laura volunteers at MESA, stocking the shelves with food for neighbors in need. Laura prepares a meal for her family while her son looks on. Rashad tries out for the little league basketball team. Angel at cheerleading practice after school. Rashad and Laura during a LEGO club meeting after school. Laura picks up Angel and Rashad from school.





# JOIN THE SUPPER CLUB

## Meeting the Need with Monthly Gifts

Even while you read this newsletter, you can bet there are homes near you where tummies are growling and pantry shelves are bare. In tens of thousands of households across the Blue Ridge area, there are neighbors worrying and wondering if they can afford something to eat tonight or tomorrow.

Children, seniors and struggling families count on food provided by the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank and our partner agencies to help them get by when times are tough.

Thanks to the faithful and consistent support of donors who make a gift every month to the Food Bank, we can rely on a steady stream of income to purchase and distribute food to our hungry neighbors.

An automatic, monthly gift – charged to your credit or debit card or automatically debited from your bank account (new!) – is the easiest way to give. Some members of the Supper Club write a check to the Food Bank every month when they sit down to pay their bills.

**NEW!**

Now donors can avoid credit card fees and sign-up for gifts to be **automatically debited** from a checking or savings account on the 15th of every month. Visit [brafb.org](http://brafb.org) to download an application and learn more.



### Other ways to become a monthly donor:

- Regular, recurring charges on a credit or debit card – *sign up online*
- Ask your bank to send a gift through monthly, automatic “bill pay”
- Write and mail a check to us every month

### What makes monthly giving so valuable to the Food Bank?

■ **It's reliable.** The program provides a consistent source of funding, allowing the Food Bank to quickly respond to urgent issues the moment they arise.

■ **It's cost effective.** Automatic donations are processed more efficiently. And monthly donors receive fewer mailings every year, which means we can dedicate income to food and programs rather than fundraising costs.

■ **It makes a difference.** Because of the reliability and cost-effectiveness of the program, thousands of additional meals can be provided to hungry people.

### How can monthly giving benefit you?

■ **It's easy.** You choose the dollar amount. If you decide to automate the process your monthly gift is transferred automatically from your bank account or credit card.

■ **It's flexible and secure.** You can increase, decrease, pause or stop your donation at any time.

■ **It's convenient.** You will receive one, consolidated tax receipt for your donations each January.

■ **It's rewarding.** You'll have the satisfaction of knowing you are helping your neighbors 365 days a year. For every \$1 you contribute each month, we can provide 4 meals.



*“I can't remember ever being hungry myself; and I believe no one should go hungry in this great country of ours that has an abundance of resources. We can share with others who are less fortunate.”*

— BEVERLY,  
VOLUNTEER AND MONTHLY DONOR



*“We've been donating on a monthly basis for several years. It's as easy as paying the electric bill and it is much more rewarding. Not only do we like the fact that our support is being used locally, we also like the way the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank is run.”*

— GARY MCGRAW AND AMY  
BARLEY, BERRYVILLE, CLARKE  
COUNTY



*“In our homes an offering of food is a gesture of love—just as the work of the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank represents true caring! Donating regularly makes me feel more a part of the mission of the Food Bank.”*

— LUCRETIA

## Valley Businesses Give Back

Food and fundraiser generates thousands of meals

For the third year, the *Valley Businesses Give Back (VBGB)* campaign kicked off in mid-November, during which local businesses rallied their employees to collect donations to help feed those struggling with hunger in the Central Shenandoah Valley.

The idea began in 2011 at The Hershey Company in Stuarts Draft, and grew from the desire to help hungry neighbors, on a very personal level.

Knowing that other local businesses wanted to give back as well, this year a new vision emerged to organize a unified food and fund drive among as many businesses as possible within the Shenandoah Valley. This time, Hershey partnered with the Greater Augusta Regional Chamber of Commerce to broaden the campaign. Forty-four businesses and organizations signed up in 2014.

“With the absence of the statewide *Governor's Bowl Food Challenge* this year, our members still wanted to host a united campaign to support the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank,” said Linda Hershey, executive director of the Chamber. “I am positive that their generosity has made a difference in our community, and we appreciate their leadership in the fight to solve hunger.”

Michael McKee, CEO of the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank, said: “A quarter of our funding comes from corporations, foundations and organizations, so local businesses play a crucial role in enabling us to feed thousands of Valley residents. We are deeply thankful for all they've helped us accomplish.”

In total, VBGB has provided enough food and funds for about 115,000 meals—44,500 pounds of food and more than \$20,000.



*Feeding Our Neighbors*

FOCUS ON VOLUNTEERS

# 5 REASONS It Pays to Volunteer



Whether it's at one of our partner food pantries, our warehouses, or school feeding programs, our volunteers tell us they work for the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank for lots of reasons. But the biggest? It just feels good to help other people. Here are five more reasons it's worth your while to spend some time with us:

**POWERED BY VOLUNTEERS**

Number of volunteers last year:

199

Number of hours donated last year:

12,745

Dollar value of time:

\$312,131

- 1 Good for your health**  
It's proven. Research shows that volunteering can raise your spirits, something that a lot of people need during the long, cold winter months. Those good feelings that come from knowing that you've helped another human being can ease stress and anxiety — and even lessen symptoms of chronic pain or heart disease in older people.
- 2 Make new pals**  
Our volunteers say they've had great conversations over a bin of canned food. In many cases, they become lifelong friends.
- 3 Resume builder**  
Teens and young adults get to add these experiences to their resumes. But people of any age have used volunteerism as a bridge to a new job or career.

- 4 Save our dollars**  
Our volunteers last year saved us more than \$312,000 — that translates to about 1.2 million meals provided to our neighbors in need. Even the smallest tasks add up to make a real difference in the lives of our hungry neighbors.

- 5 Help solve hunger**  
Unpaid volunteers are often the glue that holds a community together. Volunteering for us means you are giving a person or family in your community a chance to get through a difficult time. And when you tell other people about your work, you're spreading the word about our cause.

If you'd like to join our team as a volunteer, visit [brafb.org/volunteer](http://brafb.org/volunteer) to get an application.

We've all questioned how a person can be obese *and* food insecure.

Studies on the subject are teaching us that the two often go hand-in-hand. For people with limited income and insufficient access to healthy, affordable foods, there are cost savings in buying unhealthy foods—fast food and other low-cost, processed goods. Those foods are laden with calories, which contribute to excess weight and poor health.

In our most recent hunger study, *Hunger in America 2014*, our clients told us about their health conditions, the choices they make about their healthcare, and how they make food choices.

We're working to make it easier for our clients to access healthy food options by increasing

our fresh produce offerings. Twenty percent of our food supply now includes fresh fruits and vegetables, and we'll make way for even more healthy foods this year.

- 85%** choose to purchase unhealthy, inexpensive foods rather than go hungry
- 57%** have high blood pressure
- 30%** have diabetes
- 40%** have no health insurance of any kind
- 68%** choose between buying food and paying for medical care or medicine



**Hunger, Obesity and Poor Health**

# EXTREME MAKEOVER

Food Bank Edition



Sarah Jones puts the finishing touches on a mural she painted for the warehouse.

## Volunteers give warehouse a facelift

For an entire week in September the Food Bank's Charlottesville warehouse was abuzz with dozens of volunteers to help with our own version of Extreme Makeover.

From rolling on a fresh coat of colorful paint to helping us create a more functional warehouse space, caring individuals came together to beautify and brighten our workspace.

Their elbow grease also helped us keep expenses extremely low, allowing us to direct your generous dollars toward critical food assistance services and programs for our neighbors.

Michael McKee, CEO, and Joe Caputi, branch manager for the Charlottesville area, shared their deep gratitude: "Our staff and volunteers love the bright, colorful and friendly space you helped to create."

It's now an environment that reflects the compassion and generosity we experience every day. Thank you to all those who helped."

If you're interested in taking a tour of our renovated Charlottesville distribution center or learning more about hunger in your community, please contact Karen Ratzlaff at [kratzlaff@brafb.org](mailto:kratzlaff@brafb.org) or 540.213.8404.



### With Extreme Gratitude To:

- IN-KIND DONORS**
- Nielsen Builders, Inc.
  - Better Living Building Supply
  - The Gaines Group
  - Stantec - Architects, Engineers and Planners
  - Design Environs
  - Sarah Jones - Muralist
  - Diversified Environmental Services, Inc.
  - Plow & Hearth
  - Southern States

- PARTNERS**
- Charlottesville Newsplex
  - Monticello Media
  - United Way - Thomas Jefferson Area

- VOLUNTEERS**
- Allegheny Mountain School
  - Colonial Auto Center
  - GE Intelligent Platforms
  - Ivy Creek School
  - LexisNexis
  - ScholarOne
  - Stantec
  - UVA Dept. of Molecular Physiology and Biological Physics



# HUNGER HEROES

*We are deeply grateful to the following Hunger Heroes for hosting events that have helped us provide relief to people in need.*



## 18th Annual Christmas at Augusta Stone 29,200 meals

Nathan Moore, Rhythm Road with Richard Adams and other talented musicians and singers were among the performers in this year's benefit concert at Augusta Stone Presbyterian Church. Their donation of time and talent allowed us to feed thousands of neighbors.



## Ameriprise Day of Service 187 hours

On this national day of service, Ameriprise employees and financial advisors throughout the Blue Ridge area gave their time at our partner agencies in the Shenandoah Valley, Charlottesville, Lynchburg and Winchester.



## 2014 Charlottesville Restaurant Weeks 140,020 meals

Diners last winter and summer enjoyed meals from a wide variety of menus at 36 Charlottesville restaurants that then donated \$1 for every meal purchased to help nourish their neighbors in need. Our deepest thanks to C-Ville Weekly for sponsoring this event.



## Holiday Food Drive 10,011 meals

NBC29, Lite Rock Z95.1 and The Daily Progress encouraged Kroger shoppers to help their neighbors in need during the holidays by filling our food barrels in Waynesboro, Staunton and Charlottesville.



## Shop to Stop Hunger 26,611 meals

During this kickoff to our Holiday Food Drive six Charlottesville celebrities raced to stuff their carts with food in 60 seconds. Special thanks to Kroger for hosting the supermarket sweep.



## Homebrew for Hunger 39,028 meals

The festival that showcases local beer made by homebrewers and craft breweries packed the Fifth Season Gardening Co. in Charlottesville. They generously offered samples in exchange for charitable donations to the Food Bank.

*We're also thankful to everyone who supported these events with their time, food, funds and talent.*



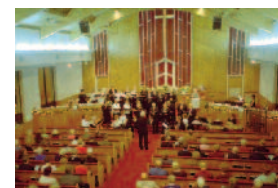
## Misty Mountain Music Festival 28,468 meals

This two-day event showcased live bluegrass, country and folk performances alongside local businesses and artisans. Festival-goers were asked to bring a donation for the Food Bank as admission, resulting in a generous gift for our hungry neighbors.



## Stuff A Truck Winchester 15,226 meals

It was another successful Stuff A Truck at the Winchester Walmart. With help from our media partners at Kiss 98-3, Shenandoah Country and 993 The Fox and the generous people who donated, we were able to fill our truck with nutritious food again this year for our neighbors in need.



## Twelfth Night 19,520 meals

Choirs from the Staunton Church of the Brethren Choir and the Olivet Presbyterian Church performed classic holiday music together during this annual concert. They kindly donated the proceeds to the Food Bank.



## Valley Businesses Give Back 24,460 meals

Forty-four local businesses stepped up to the challenge set forth by The Hershey Company and the Greater Augusta Regional Chamber of Commerce to raise food and funds for hungry Shenandoah Valley neighbors.



## Virginia Hunger Symposium 28,961 meals

Students and faculty alike were moved to action through a host of informative and entertaining activities during the 8<sup>th</sup> annual Virginia Hunger Symposium at Blue Ridge Community College. The event raised awareness about hunger, as well as food and funds for neighbors in need.



## Walmart Campaign Feeds Thousands

Nearly 5,000 votes were cast for the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank during Walmart's **Fight Hunger. Spark Change.** Facebook campaign last fall. Of the 128 Feeding America food banks competing for \$3 million in grant money, we came in among the top 50 to win \$60,000 from The Walmart Foundation.

We'll spend \$45,000 on fresh produce purchases for neighbors visiting our Mobile Food Pantry in southern Albemarle, Buckingham, Fluvanna and Nelson Counties. The remaining \$15,000 was split equally between Highland Food Pantry (Winchester), Hope Distributed, CDC (Harrisonburg), Loaves & Fishes (Charlottesville) and Candlelight Ministries (Concord) to help them purchase refrigerators or freezers.

We share our thanks with the Walmart Foundation, and all of the supporters who helped us win by casting their votes.



PHOTO BY KEVIN BLACKBURN

## Boy Scouts collect nearly **90,000 pounds** during annual food drive

The Boy Scouts of America's slogan, Do a Good Turn Daily, is intended to encourage scouts to perform acts of kindness as often as possible.

In that same spirit, Boy Scouts across our region went on their annual hunt for food donations in November and brought back thousands of food donations left at resident doorsteps during Scouting for Food.

Troops from Winchester, the Shenandoah Valley and Charlottesville, many of them in uniform, set out over several weeks distributing bags to their neighbors, asking for non-perishable food items.

The scouts then spent a Saturday picking up the donations and, with other volunteers, unloading the bags from vehicles to fill up our food trucks.

Scouting for Food is the largest fall food drive of the year for the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank, which relies on the supply for a boost going into the holiday season.

We are grateful to participating Boy Scout troops for all their hard work in collecting nearly 90,000 pounds of food during the 2014 Scouting for Food. Their donation of time, as well as the contributions from generous individuals and families who left packed bags out for pickup, have allowed us to provide our neighbors in need with 74,800 meals.



## Making the Most of Your Retirement Plan

During your lifetime, regular withdrawals from your retirement plan help you live the life you've imagined. By naming the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank as the beneficiary of your retirement assets if you pass away, you can help neighbors in need live the life they envision.

### ADDITIONAL BENEFITS INCLUDE:

- **SAVINGS** – avoid the double taxation of your heirs if you leave them the remainder
- **FLEXIBILITY** – you can revoke the Food Bank as a beneficiary if your family's needs change during your lifetime

For information about making a gift of your retirement plan assets, visit [www.brafb.org/plannedgift](http://www.brafb.org/plannedgift) or contact Karen Ratzlaff at (540) 213-8404 or [kratzlaff@brafb.org](mailto:kratzlaff@brafb.org). All inquiries will remain confidential.

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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# Asking for Help Can Be Hard

The look in his eyes said it all.

I met Bob when I was standing in for a volunteer to distribute emergency food baskets to people at our Charlottesville warehouse. His eyes looked tired, his gaze cast downward when he spoke. He had never come in for help nor had he been to any of the food pantries we supply. His overalls were heavily smudged with grease. "Unemployed," he said when I asked him if he was working. "But I'm a car mechanic."

I readied a shopping cart with about 50 pounds of food – enough to feed his wife and three children for several days – and gave him a list of pantries close to his home, which was some distance away in a neighboring county. He hardly looked up when he said thank you and how much the food would help out. Then he slipped quickly out the side door and was gone.

As I watched him push the shopping cart across the gravel lot to his truck, I wondered to myself how I would feel in his shoes. Would I smile when given three bags of groceries? Or would I look away, ashamed, perhaps, for my circumstances?

My encounter with Bob was brief, and I'll never know the burdens he carries. But I do know this: He went home that afternoon with dinner – and enough in groceries to put meals on the table for at least a few more days. And as hard as it was for him to ask for food, I'm certain that it meant a lot to him.

When I'm asked about people who somehow might be taking advantage of our system for charitable food assistance, as I often am, I think of people like Bob, struggling with the fact they are struggling, some unemployed, many working but unable to make ends meet.

Poverty is complicated. Yet in this exchange I am reminded of the beautiful simplicity of compassion. A bag of groceries can't put someone back to work, but it can ease the pain of hardship and provide a measure of comfort.

I am truly grateful that the Food Bank is able to help so many in our community, and mindful that all we do is made possible by the simple yet profound acts of compassion of friends like you. Thank you.



With gratitude,

Michael McKee, CEO

# BLUE RIDGE AREA FOOD BANK

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F: 434.296.9621

**Lynchburg Area Branch**  
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P: 434.845.4099  
F: 434.845.6153

**Lord Fairfax Area Branch**  
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Winchester, VA 22604-2342  
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F: 540.722.4217

## GET INVOLVED

For more event details, visit our News and Events page at [brafb.org](http://brafb.org), or call 540.248.3663 and press 0.

### March 2015

#### 9th Annual Legal Food Frenzy

Lawyers across Virginia will compete to raise food and funds during the 9th Annual Legal Food Frenzy. Individuals and families in the communities they serve will receive thousands of meals through this competition. But you don't have to be a lawyer to participate. Visit [brafb.org](http://brafb.org) to learn how you can support us during the Frenzy.

### April 18

#### Canstruction Lynchburg and Harrisonburg

These cities will showcase their citizens' creativity through unique structures assembled from canned food during this annual competition and food drive. Visit [brafb.org](http://brafb.org) for more details in April.



### April 22-23

#### Music Feeds Us

7:30 p.m. April 22 at Trinity Episcopal Church in Staunton

7:30 p.m. April 23 at First Presbyterian Church in Charlottesville

Join us for this special classical music series performed by talented musicians. Help neighbors in need by bringing canned food or monetary donations to the free concerts. Visit our website in March for more details.



### March 9-20

#### Neighbors-4-Neighbors School Food Drive

This food drive was founded by Albemarle teen Nicole Muller to help her hungry neighbors and has grown to receive national interest. This year more than 27 public and private schools and school administration offices are collecting food for the Food Bank.

### May 9

#### Stamp Out Hunger

Across the nation, mail carriers will come together to collect millions of meals for families in need through this annual food drive. Leave non-perishable food donations at your doorstep on Saturday, **May 9**, to help us stamp out hunger in the Blue Ridge area.



### July 19-26

#### Charlottesville Restaurant Week

Foodies will get to choose from delectable dishes at great prices from Charlottesville and Albemarle County restaurants, which then donate \$1 from every meal purchased help hungry neighbors.



### September 2015

#### Hunger Action Month

The only way we'll solve the problem of hunger is by taking action together. We'll be asking you to join us in this national movement to alleviate hunger during Hunger Action Month in September! Check our website in August to see all the ways you can get involved.



*We're proud to be awarded four stars for sound fiscal management, the highest possible rating by America's largest charity evaluator, Charity Navigator.*