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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

# Crossing Over and Giving Back

## Stories of Change and Impact

### From Client to Advocate

When young people ask him if they should go into theatre, Dick Reese tells them, “If anything can stop you, let it.” The challenges of life as an actor didn’t stop him from honing his craft. Reese attended the University of Tennessee on a wrestling scholarship. When he blew out his knee, he turned to the stage.

“Theatre makes me feel alive,” said Reese. “Wearing costumes, becoming someone else, and pretending that a stage is Denmark in the 5th century – you know it’s not real, but you allow it to happen,” he said, referring to Shakespeare’s famous tragedy Hamlet.

After years of traveling around the country and beyond as a working actor, Reese pursued a Masters in Fine Arts at the urging of his wife, Barbara, who he met when he worked for a theatre company in Canton, Ohio. Later, he accepted an offer to build and teach technical

theatre courses at Virginia Western Community College in Roanoke. Surviving as an adjunct faculty member was as challenging as surviving as an actor, he soon found.



*“When individuals come to the pantry, they often feel like they have failed. The whole idea is to make them laugh, and I’m good at that.”*

— DICK REESE

“When individuals come to the pantry, they often feel like they have failed,” said Reese. “The whole idea is to make them laugh, and I’m good at that.”

# A Food Bank Program Inspires a Hunger Hero



MARTIN-LAWSON

One hour east of Lexington, in Charlottesville, a single mom enjoys her role as catering manager for Travinia Restaurant. But times weren't always easy

for Robin Martin-Lawson. After her marriage ended, she found it hard to go from a two-earner household to being the primary provider for her two sons.

A layoff and an on-the-job injury also left her out of work for a while.

"I had a hard time finding another job," said Martin-Lawson, who has a master's degree. "I was either overqualified for available positions, or there were too many applicants for a limited number of openings."

Before she began working for Travinia, Martin-Lawson relied on the Food Bank's Family Backpack Program to make sure there was food on the table. She's glad the program was there for her family when she needed it.

"This program allowed us to have food through the weekend and, in some cases, during the week," she said.

Martin-Lawson served as a teacher and mental health professional before realizing the difference she could make in her community through catering and the restaurant business. Today, she not only manages catering but she's also

a member of the Charlottesville Chamber of Commerce. She joined to advance Travinia's community outreach goals.

"It's been meaningful," Martin-Lawson said. "Each person is put on the earth to make a difference somehow. I do what I love, and offer help."

Last year, Travinia participated in Charlottesville's bi-annual Restaurant Week, a culinary celebration that

benefits the Food Bank. Martin-Lawson also planned a holiday food drive with participating stores within the Stonefield complex where Travinia is located. Her efforts have

helped raise awareness of hunger in the Blue Ridge area.

*"Each person is put on the earth to make a difference somehow. I do what I love, and offer help."*

— ROBIN MARTIN-LAWSON

## Could This Be You?

Clients turned advocates, volunteers, and supporters — we often receive donations from people who once relied on our services. Many individuals who join our cause do so because at one time they walked in the same shoes as our food-insecure neighbors.

Whether or not you've turned to a food pantry or food bank to get you through tough times, it's not difficult to imagine how easily "that could be me."

Will you match their generosity and join the fight against hunger?



## Under-Employment and Low Wages: Who's Standing in Line?

While the economy has been adding jobs at a respectable rate, wages continue to fall or stagnate for most working Americans, according to a 2015 report from the Economic Policy Institute. Workers in the lowest 20 percentile of income are making less than they did in 2000, but the cost of living has not gone down.

### Income and poverty:\*

**30%** of our clients report annual incomes of \$1 to \$10,000

**35%** of our clients report annual incomes between \$10,001 and \$20,000

**55%** of our client households report incomes that fall at or below the federal poverty line, considering household size

**60%** of our clients report that someone in that household had a job in the previous year

\*results of the most recent Hunger in America Study, Blue Ridge Region

# RESTORING CLIENT DIGNITY

**A**fter learning from the Food Bank about a more patron-friendly model for food distribution, pantry coordinators at Loaves & Fishes in Charlottesville decided it was time to let their clients choose the foods they received.

Recently, they turned to the “client choice” approach to distributing food. Now neighbors in need can select their foods and place them in a cart almost as if they were shopping in a grocery store. Before this move, clients received the traditional, pre-selected foods bagged or boxed to take home.

Neighbors who use Loaves & Fishes love the new approach and say they can make better choices based on their families’ needs.

“With ‘choice’ you don’t get too much of one thing,” said Victoria R. as she left Loaves & Fishes. “You get just what you need, which is especially important for kids. You can avoid having to take what you know they won’t eat.

“But my son does love spinach,” Victoria added as a volunteer offered to help take her food to a waiting car.

Margaret McNett Burruss, director of Loaves & Fishes, loves the new approach too. Save for a few tweaks, her staff members easily transitioned



*“We created a more welcoming environment, and we are able to learn more about our clients.”*

— MARGARET MCNETT BURRUSS, DIRECTOR OF LOAVES & FISHES

into this new way of serving their neighbors.

“We needed a few more volunteers, we had to come in a little earlier to stock foods, and we created a ‘client guide’ role in which a volunteer walks with clients through the shopping experience and helps them make selections,” said McNett Burruss. “This means things move a lot faster than having to tally clients’ items after they’ve made their selections.”

So, what made them do it?

“The dietary needs of our patrons were a big driving force in our move to client choice,” McNett Burruss said.

A poll of Loaves & Fishes clients

revealed a preference for meat and fresh produce, which wasn’t a surprise. However, McNett Burruss didn’t expect the large number of respondents who wanted more foods low in salt and sugar.

“These responses were unsolicited and written in the comments section,” she added.

McNett Burruss also shared that there is a stronger relationship-building quality in the client choice approach. And client choice restores a sense of dignity to the person seeking help.

“It has created a more welcoming environment, and we are able to learn more about our clients,” she said. “All I see are smiles.”



**You can accomplish a lot in 3 hours: run some errands, watch a TV-show marathon, maybe do a little house cleaning.** But what if you devoted that time to sorting food to provide meals to a hungry neighbor?

This winter and spring, the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank is joining forces with Feeding America to encourage local volunteerism. Make a pledge — get involved. Inspire others to join you and make an impact.

Visit [FeedingAmerica.org/Pledge](http://FeedingAmerica.org/Pledge) to take the pledge. Enter your zip code to find opportunities near you.

**Together, we serve.**



# MAKING IT EASY TO LEND A HAND

**“You vote in elections once a year, but when you volunteer, you vote every day about the kind of community you want to live in.”**

— AUTHOR UNKNOWN

**V**olunteers are the heart and soul of the Food Bank, and every day contribute quietly but meaningfully in their communities.

Last year, Food Bank volunteers donated more than 24,000 hours of their time—equivalent to 11 full-time employees. In an organization as far-reaching as ours, coordinating their work is a big challenge.

In an effort to meet that challenge and find efficiencies to save money, we’re now using a web-based, online

scheduling tool called VolunteerHub. The software is designed specifically for non-profits.

Friends of the Food Bank can now view volunteer opportunities near their home location (new ones will be added as needs arise), and register for an activity of their choice quickly and easily. The system centralizes the flow of information, allowing us to announce new opportunities and schedule changes. Volunteers will receive automatic registration confirmation and event reminders.

Give VolunteerHub a try by visiting [brafb.org/volunteer](http://brafb.org/volunteer) where you can view all of the volunteer opportunities available. Registration is required to use the system, but once you create your account, you can manage your Food Bank volunteer experience anytime, anywhere.

If you want to coordinate a group volunteer experience, start by contacting our Volunteer Coordinator, Jennifer Clark Robertson at (540) 213-8402 or [volunteer@brafb.org](mailto:volunteer@brafb.org).

## FOCUS ON GIVING

# Meeting the Need with Monthly Gifts

“For our neighbors in need, a dependable source of donations means food on the table when they need it most. Helping hungry families in our community is a priority for my husband and me, so monthly giving makes sense—and it makes giving so easy. We don’t have to wait for a food drive or worry about remembering to send a check. We can make it a priority by planning ahead. And it’s gratifying to see how even modest monthly amounts add up over time to make a big difference. ”

— ELLEN GORTLER, EARLYSVILLE

Tonight, in tens of thousands of households across the Blue Ridge area, there are neighbors worrying and wondering if they can afford to buy something to eat.

Thankfully, in a growing number of households, there are also neighbors ready to help children, seniors, and struggling families find a way to survive when times are tough. Their faithful and consistent monthly support means the Food Bank can rely on a steady stream of income to purchase, move, and distribute food.

You can join their ranks by joining the Supper Club. Members set up automatic, monthly gifts debited from their bank account or charged to a credit or debit card.

## Why does the program work so well?

- **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’s flexible and secure.** You choose the dollar amount. You can increase, decrease, pause or stop your donation at any time. You retain control. It’s convenient. You receive one consolidated tax receipt for your donations each January.
- **It’s rewarding, and it makes a difference.** 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.



## It’s easy to join the Supper Club by becoming a monthly donor

- Avoid credit card fees and sign-up for gifts to be automatically debited from your checking or savings account (also known as ACH) on the 15th of every month. An application is available to download on our website
- Authorize regular, recurring charges on a credit or debit card – choose the Monthly frequency option when you give online at [brafb.org](http://brafb.org)
- Ask your bank to send us a gift through monthly, automatic “bill pay”
- Mail a check to us every month

To learn more, visit [www.brafb.org/supperclub](http://www.brafb.org/supperclub) or contact Karen Ratzlaff at [kratzlaff@brafb.org](mailto:kratzlaff@brafb.org) or (540) 213-8404.



“This time of year it would be challenging to be without the Food Bank.”

— TAMMY W.

“It’s a big help. At times my husband’s wages don’t go far enough to pay the bills. We’re grateful for this help.”

— ZULEYMI C. AND HER TWO SONS



“The pantry helps us because we have six children. With both of us working, it’s still not enough. Our food stamps don’t get us through the month. Food from Blessed Sacrament gets us through the last two weeks.”

— MINDY L. AND HER DAUGHTER, JAIDEN

## Compassion can be your legacy.



Imagine a world where everyone has access to adequate and nutritious food. We’ve been fighting hunger for more than 35 years and although the battle is far from won, you can help make a difference.

**You can create a legacy of compassion by planning a future gift.** Here is a simple way you can give. By establishing a “Payable-on-Death” (POD) or “Transfer-on-Death” (TOD) provision, you can transfer assets from some bank accounts, investments, and other financial accounts to the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank without the expense of a will or trust and often without the delays and costs of probate.

For more information about financial transfer gift options, 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.



# HUNGER HEROES

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



## 19th Annual Christmas at Augusta Stone 35,000 meals

Several talented performers – including Rhythm Road with Richard Adams, Nathan Moore, Constance Harrington and others – returned to Augusta Stone Presbyterian Church for this special holiday event.



## Misty Mountain Music Festival 15,637 meals

The two-day event in September showcased live bluegrass, country and folk performances alongside local businesses and artisans. The dedicated organizers accepted donations to the Food Bank as admission to the festival.



## Ameriprise Day of Service 169 hours

Ameriprise employees and financial advisors throughout the Blue Ridge area donated their time at our partner agencies in the Shenandoah Valley, Charlottesville, Lynchburg and Winchester.



## Holiday Food Drive 8,164 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 at stores in Waynesboro, Staunton and Charlottesville.



## Dominion \$100,000 in 2015

In December, the Dominion Foundation awarded the Food Bank the latest \$25,000 grant that will support Farm Fresh, a program aimed at providing greater amounts and varieties of fresh, local produce to neighbors in need.



## Monoflo International 130,012 meals

The employees of Monoflo and Total Molding Concepts, both of Winchester, selected the Food Bank as the beneficiary of their annual Christmas raffle.



## Genworth 52,083 meals

Genworth generously provided a \$10,000 grant to purchase 62,500 pounds of fresh produce for distribution to individuals and families in need in the Greater Lynchburg area. Some of the produce is being used by the Virginia Cooperative Extension in their nutrition and cooking classes. VCE hosts cooking demonstrations with hundreds of children and adults each month to guide them in the preparation of delicious meals.



## Perdue 1.5 million meals since 2000

In September, longtime supporter Perdue donated 10,000 pounds of chicken products and \$50,000 toward the expansion of the Food Bank's warehouse so that more food, especially fresh produce, could be distributed through our network of partner agencies in the Shenandoah Valley to neighbors in need.





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



**Scouting for Food**  
**77,695 meals**

Scouts collected thousands of pounds of donated food from the doorsteps of generous neighbors in Winchester, the Shenandoah Valley and Charlottesville to help feed individuals and families in need.



**Shop to Stop Hunger**  
**30,880 meals**

During the Holiday Food Drive eight Charlottesville celebrities raced to stuff their carts with food in 60 seconds. Special thanks to Home Instead Senior Care and Kroger for co-sponsoring the supermarket sweep.



**Virginia Hunger Symposium**  
**37,205 meals**

Students and faculty alike were moved to action through a host of informative and entertaining activities during the 9th 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.



**UVA Challah for Hunger**  
**28,672 meals to date**

This student-run group at the University of Virginia kneads and rolls dough every week during the school year to raise awareness of and money for hunger relief through the sale of Challah bread.



**EC Glass and Heritage High Schools**  
**84,000 meals**

For the past six years, students and faculty from these Lynchburg area schools have staged an annual Turkey Challenge in which the community is invited to donate turkeys or funds to help local families celebrate the holidays.

# Virtual Food Drive

*A Virtual Food Drive provides an easy, immediate and effective way for you and your group to get involved with ending hunger in central and western Virginia.*

**The benefits of hosting an online drive include:**

- Virtual format makes it easy to use and manage
- Allows for 100 percent group involvement
- Eco-friendly and cost efficient
- Every \$1 provides four meals
- You can invite your colleagues, associates, friends, or family to join you and make an impact from the comfort of their home or desk.
- If you're with a company, we can customize a web page with your logo and send you a link to distribute to your employees. From there, they can click and drag food icons into a grocery cart to make an online donation.

**Check it out!**  
[www.brafb.org/VirtualFoodDrive](http://www.brafb.org/VirtualFoodDrive)



Pictured above: representatives from 2015 participating organizations.

# Valley Businesses Give Back

## Annual Food and Fund Drive – June 2016

Align your business with the Food Bank’s cause this summer, and make a big difference for your neighbors in need.

When school’s out, some kids face their toughest test because summer also spells the end of free and reduced school meal programs which often means greater food-insecurity for families.

Valley Businesses Give Back (VBGB) is an annual, friendly competition between businesses and organizations in the Shenandoah Valley to see who can raise the most money and collect the most non-perishable food to help stock the

shelves of the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank during the summer months.

This year’s VBGB drive will take place June 6 to June 24, 2016.

Since 2011, local businesses and organizations have donated more than 36,000 pounds of food and collected more than \$15,000 for our neighbors in need. Help us demonstrate to them how much our business community cares.

Visit [www.brafb.org/vbgb](http://www.brafb.org/vbgb) to register your business by May 1, 2016.

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# Walking in Their Shoes

I was 12 when my mother lost her job.

I remember the day she came home with the news. It was just the two of us... she had no one else to tell. She had managed a group of telephone answering services for many years, but her position was eliminated when the owner sold the business to a larger company. After several months out of work, she settled for a cafeteria job at an assisted living center. She was in her 50s, and finished out her working years in that same cafeteria. She never again earned more than \$10,000 per year.

As an adult, I realized that my mother never quite recovered from that job loss. Materially, she somehow managed to make ends meet. But emotionally, she was hollowed out. She had imagined more comfort in our lives and more opportunities for me than she was ever able to afford. She was the provider in our family, but years later confided to me that she felt inadequate in that role.

I think about her often in my work at the Food Bank. While I know of no time that we had to turn to a food pantry, I see many people in the same situation as she – out of work or underemployed. And I can imagine not just the stress of trying to juggle the bills and put food on the table, but also the emotional burden of feeling as though they have somehow fallen short.

I'm heartened, though, by the profound kindness and compassion of the many volunteers who work in the food pantries, soup kitchens and shelters we serve, some of whom have themselves sought help from time to time. Their warmth heals the spirit in the way food nourishes the body.

What we do is about so much more than food. I'm so grateful for the dedication of our partners and volunteers who not only help people – like those profiled in our cover story – get back on their feet, but also maintain their dignity and resolve. And I'm grateful, too, for the support you provide as a donor to make our work possible. Thank you.



With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael McKee". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Michael McKee, CEO



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BLUE RIDGE AREA  
FOOD BANK

PO Box 937  
Verona, VA 24482



## BRANCH LOCATIONS

**Shenandoah Valley Area Branch & Headquarters Office**  
PO Box 937  
96 Laurel Hill Road  
Verona, VA 24482-0937  
P: 540.248.3663  
F: 540.248.6410

**Thomas Jefferson Area Branch**  
1207 Harris Street  
Charlottesville, VA 22906-6415  
P: 434.296.3663  
F: 434.296.9621

**Lynchburg Area Branch**  
501 12th Street, Suite B  
Lynchburg, VA 24504-2527  
P: 434.845.4099  
F: 434.845.6153

**Lord Fairfax Area Branch**  
1802 Roberts Street  
Winchester, VA 22604-2342  
P: 540.665.0770  
F: 540.722.4217

# GET INVOLVED

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



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

## April 2016 Canstruction

**Lynchburg, Charlottesville and Harrisonburg**  
These cities will showcase their citizens' creativity through unique structures assembled from canned food during this annual competition and food drive.

## April 4-15 10th 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.

## March 7-25 Neighbors-4-Neighbors School Food Drive

Now led by 8th grader Ryleigh Katstra, this drive organizes students in the greater Charlottesville area to help their hungry neighbors. Last year more than 30 public and private schools and school administration offices collected food for the Food Bank. If your school isn't participating but wants to, send an email to [fooddrive@brafb.org](mailto:fooddrive@brafb.org).

## May 14 Stamp Out Hunger

Across the country, mail carriers will provide millions of meals to families in need through this annual food drive. Leave non-perishable food donations at your doorstep on Saturday, May 14, to help us stamp out hunger in the Blue Ridge area.



## June 6-24 Valley Businesses Give Back

Support area businesses participating in this community-wide food and fund drive.

The food collected will be distributed by the Food Bank to individuals and families in need throughout the Shenandoah Valley. For more information and to get your business on the list, visit [brafb.org/vbgb](http://brafb.org/vbgb).

## July 15-23 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 2016 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.

