

# harvest

A NEWSLETTER OF THE BLUE RIDGE AREA FOOD BANK

## Canning Hunger and Preserving Hope

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a Helping Hand

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Blue Ridge Area  
**FOOD BANK**

A member of  
**FEEDING  
AMERICA**



# Canning Hunger and Preserving Hope

## Senior Clients Lend a Helping Hand

Seventy-year-old Naomi McCray transports her Bath County Fair ribbons to Ashwood United Methodist Church's food pantry in a plastic box with a secure lid. Her collection, accrued through the years, is organized into neat piles: A stack of blue ribbons represents first-place honors for her homemade sauerkraut and pickled beets, and a massive purple ribbon — labeled “Best in Show” — she credits to her famous fig preserves.

Both a Food Bank client and dedicated volunteer, Naomi never misses a distribution. Not only does she pick up the fresh ingredients she needs to eat well (and fill her pickling jars with leftover produce), but she exudes positivity from where she perches in Fellowship Hall, donning her orange Food Bank shirt, greeting neighbors, and helping them select self-care items.

“I need my kisses!” one woman exclaims, her arms outstretched toward Naomi. Yet another visitor sneaks up behind Naomi, resulting in friendly banter and hiccup-y laughter. Naomi’s eyes crinkle under pink-rimmed glasses when she smiles.

### **Gathering for food and community**

“This is a way for folks to experience community,” says Robin Swecker, partner services coordinator at the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank. “Folks arrive at the pantry early because it gives them time to catch up.”

In a county of 4,000 residents, everyone knows everyone. Two elementary schools and one grocery store dot the 535-square-mile expanse. Despite its rural nature, Bath

is a food desert and fresh produce is tough to come by. Seniors outnumber young folks, and those who can hold jobs often do so seasonally. Need is a shared understanding, and hunger is, more or less, accepted. Many people – especially seniors – rely on multiple pantry distributions to get by month to month.

A Frost, West Virginia native raised on a farm, Naomi was accustomed to “growing what [she] ate.” Now unable to garden due to disability, she has turned to canning, transforming surplus into treasured jars for future meals. She cites the influx of fresh produce at pantry distributions as an exciting addition.

## A busy day helping others

All afternoon, Naomi’s husband James buzzes around the parking lot with a clipboard, checking in recipients for the Senior Food Box Program (CSFP) and loading the government-issued boxes into backseats and truck beds. Meanwhile, many other volunteers help clients pack up everything from pinto beans to peaches. In total, 180 people are served that day at Ashwood – not including the 18 whose Senior Food Boxes will be delivered by Naomi and James after the five-hour distribution concludes. (St. Luke’s Episcopal Church, a partner agency down the road in Hot Springs, facilitates this process.)

A former Augusta County correctional officer, James is organized, polite, and permanently postured at attention. That morning, Naomi notes, “He got up and did laundry and vacuumed the house before we left.” When the 68-year-old married Naomi in 2012, she says, “he married into volunteering” alongside her.

By the time the pair finally peels out from the church parking lot at 6 pm to deliver to their homebound neighbors, they have their own distribution stowed and James is behind the wheel. Naomi reigns in the passenger seat. “He’s my legs,” she says. “I direct!”

## Why Naomi gives

Most days, Naomi displays her ribbons proudly on the walls of her home. Nearby, home-canned goods sit stacked beneath the bed, fill the closet, and occupy the inside of a giant chest. This stored supply means there will be more preserves to present at the fair, more green beans to spoon onto plates at Windy Cove funerals, and more sauerkraut to share with neighbors.

“I just like giving to people!” Naomi says. “It makes me feel good.” She’s kept herself so busy volunteering since she stopped working that she can’t remember when she retired. The Food Bank supported her in a time of need, so she sees her service as a natural progression. “They say, ‘Pay it forward.’ Well, I’m giving back!”

# The Scope of Senior Hunger

The McCray family is just one of the senior households we serve. The numbers below reveal more about senior hunger:

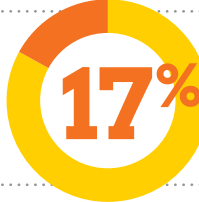
The number of people served monthly through Food Bank senior nutrition programs (Senior Food Boxes and Reach)

2,853 

 53%

How much more likely a hungry senior is to have a heart attack than a peer with access to healthy, sufficient food

Blue Ridge Area Food Bank clients who are seniors (age 60+)

17% 

\$98 

The average monthly SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) benefit for eligible senior households

Virginia households with seniors facing food insecurity

 6%

(Sources: Food Research & Action Center, 2014–2016; Feeding America, 2019)

**Many people – especially seniors – rely on multiple pantry distributions to get by month to month.**

Visit [www.brafb.org/reach](http://www.brafb.org/reach) to learn more about Food Bank programs that help low-income seniors.





**Join now  
(by February 22)  
and see your  
impact double.**

**There's no better time  
to join the Supper Club**

The Manning Family Foundation will match a full year of donations from the first 100 donors who officially join The Supper Club, by February 22, up to a total of \$40,000.

# Monthly Gifts:

## Impactful, Convenient, Budget-Friendly

The Supper Club identifies the Food Bank's community of faithful friends who make gifts on a monthly basis to help us meet the needs of our neighbors.

### The impact you can make is substantial

For the cost of a premium Netflix subscription, you can provide 64 meals per month, or 768 meals per year.

For the cost of a cup of coffee (a large, fancy one!), you can provide 40 meals per month, or 480 meals per year.

Monthly giving is a low-cost, efficient way to make an impact, and we promise to show you the difference you are making in your community throughout the year.

## It's Easy to Give Monthly

- **Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT)** — an automatic, secure debit from your bank that avoids credit card fees
- **Credit card**
- **Bank bill pay** — set up a monthly distribution to the Food Bank

Visit [www.brafb.org/supperclub](http://www.brafb.org/supperclub) for more information, or contact Karen Ratzlaff with questions at [kratzlaff@brafb.org](mailto:kratzlaff@brafb.org) or 540-213-8404.

**“We consider  
The Supper Club  
a part of our  
monthly food bill.”**

— AMES AND CHRIS WINTER, PARENTS OF  
THREE AND SUPPER CLUB MEMBERS

## It's easy on your budget

Some donors find it easier to make a larger impact by budgeting their gift out in equal installments throughout the year.

*“Being able to give monthly to causes we feel strongly about allows us to spread out our giving, and we absorb it into our family budget. We consider The Supper Club a part of our monthly food bill.”*

— Ames and Chris Winter, parents of three and Supper Club members

## It's convenient for you and reliable for the Food Bank

*“I used to give a lump sum, but this food thing kept bugging me. I'm retired and have a fixed income, but I no longer need ‘things.’ I decided to donate monthly by credit card, and giving this way helps the Food Bank with their budgeting.”*

— Ava Baum, volunteer and Supper Club member

Set up your donation — either by credit card or Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) — and let it run! You retain control and can adjust your giving at any time.

Thanks to monthly donors, we know how much financial support we can count on throughout the year to meet the highs and lows of client demand.

## You Believe in Helping Others

You donate food, funds, and time to help your neighbors in need — and you are making a difference today. **You can also make a difference tomorrow.**

After you have provided for your loved ones in your will, consider including a gift to the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank. Your bequest is a lasting testament to a cause that matters to you, and you will help us feed families in the future.

Visit [www.brafb.org/give/planned-giving/](http://www.brafb.org/give/planned-giving/) or contact Millie Winstead at 434-220-4335 or [mwinstead@brafb.org](mailto:mwinstead@brafb.org) for more information. All inquiries will remain confidential.





# A Prescription for Healthy Food

## Food Pharmacy Program at UVA Kidney Center Clinic

Patients with chronic health conditions now have greater access to wholesome foods and a chance for a healthier life, thanks to an innovative partnership between the Food Bank and the University of Virginia (UVA) Kidney Center Clinic and generous funding from Sentara Healthcare/Optima Health.

### Easy access to specific, nutritious foods

The Food Pharmacy offers a “prescription for nutrition” for patients on dialysis who are food insecure, providing healthy food options that meet their strict dietary needs — particularly foods lower in sodium, potassium, and phosphorus. During scheduled visits to the Kidney Center Clinic, patients who have self-identified as food insecure will have easy access to a bag of medically tailored foods.

The patients face many barriers to healthy eating. Spending hours in the clinic, for example, drains their energy, often leaving them too fatigued to cook. And financial struggles often make it difficult for them to afford nutritious foods.

“This is a really vulnerable group of people, and they are managing diseases that have very specific dietary needs,” says Michelle Hesse, the Food Bank’s director of agency relations and programs. “We hope to break down some barriers to allow them to make food

choices that help them manage their chronic disease. Ultimately, we hope the results will be evident in a better quality of life.”

### Good food for a better life

Because dialysis patients typically receive treatment for up to 12 hours each week, dietitians have time to provide nutrition education and recipes that incorporate foods selected from the clinic pantry.

“The UVA dialysis team is very excited to partner with the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank in exploring new ways in which we can address the food insecurity issues faced by the unique patient population that we serve,” says Dwayne Phillips, RN, MBA, CPM, nurse manager for the Kidney Center Clinic Dialysis Program at UVA Health System. “We never want any patient to be forced to make a decision between securing adequate nutrition or paying for their prescribed care.”

Funding for the program comes from a \$1 million grant awarded to the Federation of Virginia Food Banks by Sentara Healthcare and Optima Health, an affirmation of the central role that nutrition plays in promoting positive health outcomes. With its share of the funds, the Food Bank will eventually extend Food Pharmacy to other health care settings as well.

To learn more about the Food Bank’s programs, visit [www.brafb.org/programs](http://www.brafb.org/programs).

# Why I SERVE

It takes many helping hands to operate a food bank, and our staff members rely on active community support to feed families in need. Last year, Food Bank volunteers donated enough hours to be the equivalent of 15 full-time paid staff positions.\*

Each volunteer has a “why” — a reason why he or she gives back through the Food Bank. Three regulars shared their stories with us:

**I have been blessed in my life but have never lost awareness that others in our community are less fortunate. The Blue Ridge Area Food Bank affords me the opportunity to help the hidden parts of my community. I’m also a monthly contributor because we need to help our fellow citizens with both our energy and our wallets.”**

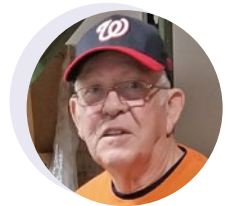


Larry Stopper

—Larry Stopper, VOLUNTEER AT THE NELSON COUNTY MOBILE FOOD PANTRY

We are grateful for the 700+ volunteers like Gwen, Larry, and Tom who give so generously of their time to help their neighbors. If you would like to join our caring volunteer force, please look for opportunities on our website at [www.brafb.org/volunteer](http://www.brafb.org/volunteer).

**I have been involved with the Food Bank for over 14 years. I spent my adult life managing supermarkets, so this seemed like a natural fit. Over the years, our Wednesday volunteers have increased to six (a great bunch of guys who meet for breakfast before reporting to work). This has been a labor of love.”**



Tom Morris

—Tom Morris, VOLUNTEER IN THE WINCHESTER WAREHOUSE

**I learned at an early age there are hungry people out there. I continued to meet people with food insecurity throughout my working life. When I partially retired several years ago, I began volunteering at the Food Bank and at a local food pantry. Best thing I have ever done.”**



Gwen Eavers

—Gwen Eavers, VOLUNTEER IN THE VERONA WAREHOUSE

*\*Based on the value of volunteer time by independentsector.org*

## Follow the Food Bank



### Are you on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram?

Follow the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank for more stories about our volunteers, our staff, and the people we serve. Connect with others and share your passion for ensuring that everyone has enough to eat.

For email updates, subscribe to one or more of our newsletters: [www.brafb.org/newslettersignup](http://www.brafb.org/newslettersignup).



We are deeply grateful to the following Hunger Heroes who helped us provide relief to people in need. We're also thankful to everyone who supported these events and initiatives with their time, food, funds, and talent.



**Martin's Food**  
**98,296 meals + 500 turkeys**  
 This caring grocer and their generous customers made a substantial impact across the Blue Ridge area.



**Red Nose Day Fund**  
**8,798 family-sized meals**  
 A fun national campaign created by Comic Relief Inc. supports the Family Backpack program.



**Virginia Premier**  
**600 Reach Food Boxes + 330 Summer Kid Packs**  
 Connecting nutrition and health, this health care company is looking out for seniors and kids.



**Dominion Energy**  
**\$15,625 grant**  
 Our portion of a grant via the Federation of Virginia Food Banks will pay for offsite cold storage of thousands of pounds of fresh and frozen foods.



**Misty Mountain Camp Resort**  
**50,100 meals**  
 This local music festival rocked out for the benefit of families facing hunger.



**Impact 1890 — National Lutheran Communities & Services**  
**40,000 meals**  
 This organization helped us provide food boxes to more than 600 low-income seniors.



**Kyanite Mining**  
**60,000 meals**  
 This company made a hyper-local impact by funding several distributions at the Dillwyn Mobile Food Pantry.



**Scouting for Food**  
**58,300 meals**  
 Enterprising Scouts picked up food from the doorsteps of generous neighbors throughout Winchester, the Shenandoah Valley, and Charlottesville.



**Virginia Hunger Symposium**  
**28,000 meals**  
 Motivated to make a difference, students and faculty raised awareness as well as food and funds at Blue Ridge Community College.



**Charlottesville Restaurant Week and C-Ville Weekly**  
**130,056 meals**  
 In January and July 2019, Restaurant Week diners enjoyed the city's best restaurants and helped provide meals to people in need.



Aetna Better Health® of Virginia

**Aetna Better Health of Virginia**  
**20,000 meals**  
 Aetna improved health through nutritious food distributed at the Scottsville and Palmyra Mobile Food Pantries.



**Wegmans**  
**21,833 meals**  
 In 2019, this generous grocer provided truckloads of reclaimed food and their customers donated non-perishable food items during the annual Fill-the-Bus event.





### Enterprise

62,000 meals

Enterprise fueled the potential of thousands of Blue Ridge neighbors through their "Fill Your Tank" donation program.



### Woodforest Bank

28,000 meals

Support of the Family BackPack program and community food distributions provided nutrition for children and families.



ARCONIC FOUNDATION

### Kawneer / Arconic Foundation

40,000 meals

The generosity of Kawneer employees ensured access to nutritious food in rural Timberville via the Mobile Food Pantry.



### Abbott Laboratories

8,798 family-sized meals

Abbott has been helping feed vulnerable school children and their families in the Lynchburg area since 2012.



### Farm Credit of the Virginias

168,000 pounds of produce + 11,000 half-gallons of fresh milk

This caring company is dedicated to connecting people to the wholesome foods they need, while supporting the Virginia agricultural economy.



### Giant Food

62,655 meals + 1,000 turkeys

Thanks to Giant's generosity, students and families facing hunger will have access to healthy meals, and Thanksgiving was a bit brighter for some lucky families.



### Home Instead Senior Care - Charlottesville, Harrisonburg, Lynchburg

24,000+ meals

Local owners co-sponsored three Shop to Stop Hunger events, while local "celebrities" brought in food and funds to extend the impact.



### Kroger

8,370 meals + 520 turkeys

Kroger hosted the month-long Holiday Food Drive and three Shop to Stop Hunger events. And, for every touchdown scored by UVA football this season, Kroger donated 10 turkeys for the winter holidays.



### Trans-Siberian Orchestra

30,596 meals

This progressive rock band entertained a packed arena with their holiday special and allocated a portion of ticket sales to transform lives through nutritious food.

# Get Involved

## Opportunities abound to lend a helping hand

### MARCH 2 - 20 The School Food Drive

Calling young hunger heroes! Students in the greater Charlottesville area join forces annually to help neighbors facing hunger. If you want your school to participate, email Colleen at cberger@brafb.org.

### MARCH 28 - APRIL 6

#### Canstruction Lynchburg

Lynchburg competitors use canned food to create unique sculptures while raising awareness and funds. The 2020 theme is Mythical Creatures and Fairy Tales.

A phenomenal group of Lynchburg volunteers has made their Canstruction extraordinarily successful and valuable to the Food Bank for six years. Canstruction happens around the globe - a Lynchburg entry won the 2018 International People's Choice Award competition. Congrats!



### APRIL 20 - MAY 1 Legal Food Frenzy

Law students and professors, lawyers and legal staff, and judges compete to raise food and funds for individuals facing hunger in the communities they serve. Family and friends make contributions to support different firms.

### APRIL 22 Great Community Give

Over the course of a single online giving day benefitting area nonprofits, Harrisonburg and Rockingham County residents can support the Food Bank's Neighborhood Produce Market.

### MAY 9 Stamp Out Hunger

Leave non-perishable food donations at your doorstep on Saturday, May 9 for pickup by your local postal carrier. This is the Food Bank's largest annual food drive.

### JUNE 1 - 19 Valley Businesses Give Back

This friendly competition between Shenandoah Valley businesses and organizations helps stock our shelves during the summer months. If you want your company to participate in this food-and-fund drive, email Jennifer at jclarkrobertson@brafb.org.

### JULY 17 - 25 Charlottesville Restaurant Week

Try a new restaurant or an old favorite, and your fun night out can help your neighbors in need! One dollar from every meal helps provide four meals.

### SEPTEMBER Hunger Action Month

One in every 12 people in the Blue Ridge area faces hunger, but together we can make a real difference. Join this month-long, national movement to raise awareness about food insecurity.

For details on these and other events, visit our website at [www.brafb.org/events](http://www.brafb.org/events) or call 540-248-3663.

# How We Work Together

**Our vision is simple – that everyone has enough to eat.**

Yet today, one out of every 12 of our neighbors living in the Blue Ridge service area experiences hunger.

While our vision is simple, food banking is complex. Here's how we provide nourishing food to 103,500 people every month. (Hint: Lots of partnerships and helping hands, including yours!)



## We distribute food via partners and programs

- 205 partner food pantries, soup kitchens, and shelters
- 174 sites for mobile, senior, and child nutrition programs in underserved areas
- 716 Food Bank volunteers last year, plus hundreds of partner agency volunteers



## We secure donations

- From farmers, manufacturers, grocery stores, the federal government, and YOU
- Our efficient stewardship of funds earns us a four-star Charity Navigator rating, year after year

## We move food

- 26+ million pounds of food each year – about 27% is fresh produce
- 540 tractor-trailer loads annually into the Verona warehouse (later distributed to our branches)



## We safely store food



- Our four warehouses consistently receive high scores from the certifying food-safety organization
- Enhanced cold-storage capacity supports an increase in fresh foods

## Together, we feed people in need



- 103,500 neighbors each month – a line that would span 41 miles
- Across 25 counties and eight cities
- Children, seniors, the working poor, disabled neighbors, the newly unemployed, families, and homeless individuals

**Many hands come together to make a difference. For more information on how the Food Bank works, please visit our website at [www.brafb.org/how-we-work](http://www.brafb.org/how-we-work).**

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# When the golden years aren't

I didn't expect to see well-dressed grandparents at our Mobile Food Pantry distribution in Timberville. And by the expression on their faces, they didn't expect to find themselves there, either.

They were in an immaculate, older sedan and easily could have been on their way to church, were it not Thursday morning. They smiled as I approached their car with two bags of groceries, and I detected a glint of shame in their eyes. The gentleman nodded, thanked me... “a blessing,” he said... and slowly drove off.

We bring our Mobile Food Pantry to nine rural locations in Albemarle, Bath, Buckingham, Fluvanna, Highland, Nelson, Orange, Page, and Rockingham Counties. Most distributions are once a month, and people line up hours before our truck arrives. Many are like the couple I came across in Timberville — older, living on meager incomes, and struggling to get by.

It's hard to reconcile the idea that someone can work hard all his or her life and still need to turn to charity simply to get enough to eat. But the reality is that hunger is growing among seniors faster than among any other age group.

We feel blessed at the Food Bank to be able to respond to our older neighbors, not only through Mobile Food Pantry distributions, but also through programs that distribute food boxes to almost 3,000 seniors each month — more than 10 times the number of just a few years ago.

Your support, of course, makes these programs possible. On behalf of everyone at the Food Bank and those we serve, thank you!

Warmest regards,



*Michael McKee*

Michael McKee  
Chief Executive Officer

## Remembering with Gratitude

### The Food Bank's founder, Phil Grasty (1930-2019)

Driven by faith and commitment, Phil recruited four like-minded, compassionate, and passionate board members to join him in creating the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank in 1981. He was named the first executive director in November of that year and served in that role until 2000.



Without a doubt, tens of thousands of Virginians and hundreds of Food Bank staffers and volunteers owe Phil Grasty a debt of gratitude. He stepped in to fill a void to ensure that charitable food assistance was available in central and western Virginia, and we all live in healthier communities as a result of his vision and leadership.



Blue Ridge Area  
**FOOD BANK**

A member of  
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BLUE RIDGE AREA  
FOOD BANK

PO Box 937  
Verona, VA 24482



**OUR MISSION** is to provide nourishing food to our neighbors in need through vibrant community partnerships and passionate public support.

## BRANCH LOCATIONS

We serve your community through one of four distribution centers:

**Shenandoah Valley Area Branch & Headquarters**  
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 22903-5319  
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

## Your Advocacy for Seniors Can Make a Difference

Hunger is growing old.

One in nine individuals the Food Bank serves is 60 or older, and a growing number of seniors need our help. Nationally, Feeding America reports the rate of senior hunger has increased by 45% since 2001.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) can support seniors in need, but only one in three SNAP-eligible seniors in Virginia uses the federal benefit.

Your advocacy can change things. **Ask state policy makers to ease access barriers to SNAP for vulnerable neighbors in their twilight years.** Visit our website for more information: [www.brafb.org/advocate](http://www.brafb.org/advocate).



**2 out of 3**  
**eligible seniors**  
**in Virginia are**  
**NOT enrolled**  
**in SNAP.**

**CHEW  
ON THIS**