

harvest

A NEWSLETTER OF THE BLUE RIDGE AREA FOOD BANK

Rooted in Experience and Growing for Impact

Four strategic priorities guide our work

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Blue Ridge Area

FOOD BANK

Everyone should have enough to eat.

A member of
FEEDING AMERICA

Rooted in Experience

AND GROWING FOR IMPACT

Four strategic priorities will guide the Food Bank's work over the next 18 months

When the road ahead is hazy, how do you identify the right route to take?

Every five years, the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank charts a path into the future. But when COVID-19 disrupted 2020, it threw a wrench in the typical cycle. Long-term planning was put on pause: Everyone shifted into emergency-response mode.

But Food Bank leaders and staff had already led multiple community-listening sessions

across the service area with food-distribution partners, public-agency representatives, and regional nonprofit leaders. These forums, paired with local and national research, unearthed *four critical themes*—key priorities that partners and other stakeholders helped identify.

Once operations stabilized somewhat, committee members recognized that the priorities proposed months earlier remained central to the Food Bank's mission. And we *are* intent on moving forward on behalf of our neighbors in need, despite the uncertainty. The planning period may be shorter than usual, but strategy will guide us in the coming months.

OUR PRIORITIES

1

Strengthening and developing our food-assistance network

Feeding our roots

Everything we do funnels through our partnerships with community organizations. So, our ability to meet the needs of our neighbors really depends on the strength and resilience of this network. We're making adaptations to help our partners continue serving, while also building new relationships with organizations throughout our service area.

2

Improving access to vulnerable populations

Harvesting for everyone

For children and seniors in particular, the consequences of hunger can be severe. Kids are more likely to experience behavioral, developmental, and educational challenges if they are undernourished. Seniors—who tend to be less mobile and more vulnerable health wise—are at risk without access to enough food.

What's more, the pandemic has illuminated disparities in food access among different racial and ethnic communities, including immigrant and refugee populations. The Food Bank must step up to fill gaps and address inequities by expanding outreach (in many languages), connecting individuals to local services, partnering with trusted groups in communities, and creating more welcoming and inclusive experiences for all neighbors.

3

Supporting improved nutrition for better health

Planting seeds of wellness

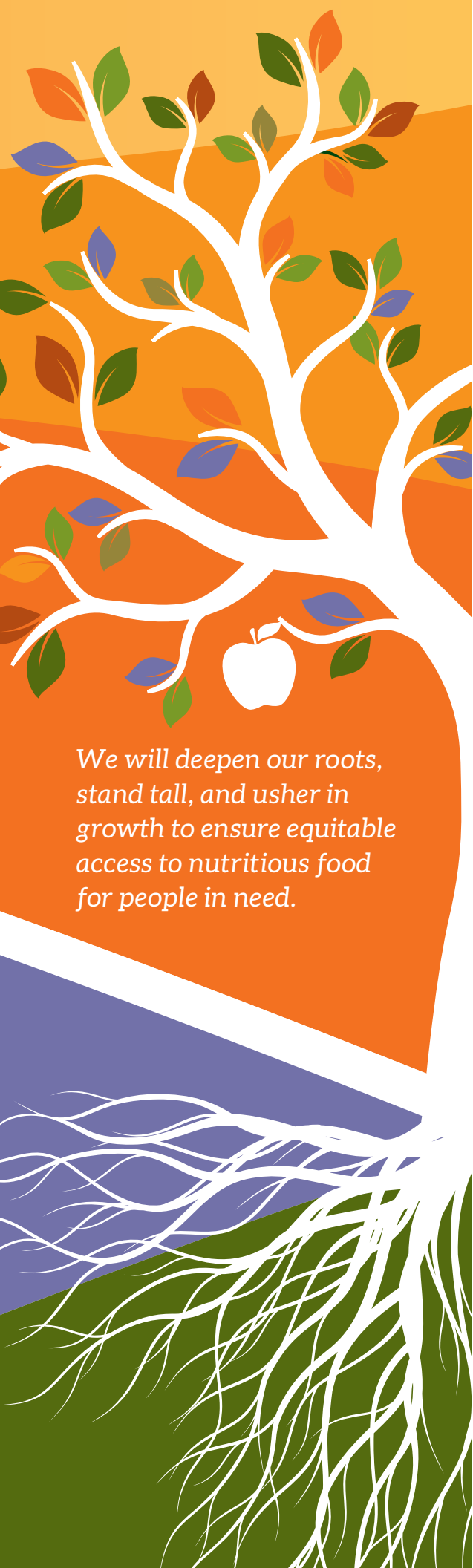
Food banking isn't only about supplying calories; it's about nourishing neighbors' lives with nutrient-rich food. In fact, wellness is so central to the work of hunger relief that it's a core part of the USDA's definition for food security: "access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy lifestyle." That's why we are focusing on acquiring more nutritious food and partnering with health-care providers to get good food to people whose health depends on it. And as the pandemic recedes, look for us to be more involved in nutrition education, as well.

4

Expanding outreach and advocacy

Branching out and standing strong

Hunger is not a food problem. Nonprofits alone can't improve the employment landscape or reverse income inequality, much less solve poverty. More and more families we serve are working but falling further behind financially. That's why we need the government to bolster federal nutrition programs for children, seniors, and families.



We will deepen our roots, stand tall, and usher in growth to ensure equitable access to nutritious food for people in need.

FEEDING A LEGACY OF GREATNESS



Pictured above: Volunteer Fannie Louden, Community Coordinator Edward Brooks, Pantry Coordinator Berlinda Mills

Yancey Pantry offers hope, community to Esmont residents

At B.F. Yancey Community Center, history flows through the halls. Once home to an elementary school originally established to help Black youth flourish, the building is inextricable from its past. Painted handprints and colorful notes from former students freckle the walls. And every weekday at 2:25 p.m., the bell still rings.

Nearly everyone in Esmont (Albemarle County) has some tie to the school, so when it was closed in 2017, its loss was felt widely and deeply. Locals saw it as their responsibility to preserve the space's promise: The mission of the new community center is to improve the wellbeing of the community and promote its longevity. Today, multiple entities occupy the former school building, including the Jefferson Area Board for Aging, Piedmont Virginia Community College, and the B.F. Yancey Community Food Pantry.

Food Pantry Coordinator Berlinda Mills is a retired teacher, determined to serve neighbors she calls "family." When not running drive-through distributions, pantry reps pack their cars and drive food to neighbors who are homebound. "You...have to give these teachers credit," says one community member.

"They [didn't] just sit back and say, 'Well, I'm retired.'" Instead, they cultivated an efficient food-assistance operation—one that's homegrown and fueled by loved.

At the Food Bank, we recognize that **our partnerships anchor us to the community.** "If our network isn't resilient, we cannot fulfill our mission," says CEO Michael McKee. Cultivating a healthy and sustainable network includes seeking new partners "who will help us reach underserved communities and tap new wells [of] enthusiasm." The Yancey pantry, which was launched in 2017 and serves an average of 60 households each month, is a more recent addition to the Food Bank network.

What does support for partner pantries look like? For Yancey, it looks like providing about 75% of the pantry's food, according to Berlinda. It means awarding two agency capacity fund grants to help supply everything from grocery baskets and flatbeds to refrigeration and shelving. And it means maintaining an open line of communication to help with problem solving and supporting the pantry's growth.

"We're a blessing, and we're being blessed," says Berlinda. "[We're able] to give out to those who really don't have."

Read more about Yancey's rich history and current community impact at www.brafb.org/blog-chew-on-this.

A GIFT BEYOND MEASURE

Donors:
*Thank you for showing
up for your neighbors*



In recent years, the task of providing nourishing food to people who need it has shown up in ways we couldn't anticipate. Government furloughs, floods, tornadoes—these local challenges required the Food Bank to respond creatively and quickly to put food on the table of affected Virginians, over and above typical distributions.

And then came the biggest challenge of all—a national public-health pandemic and an economic emergency unlike anything seen in recent memory.

Now, almost a year after the monster “storm” hit, everyone engaged in the work of hunger relief is tired. Still, we remain committed.

The Food Bank is the backbone of a vast network of hundreds of interconnected, hunger-relief organizations in central and western Virginia. And we are ready to support our neighbors for as long as it takes for them to get back on their feet after job losses and health crises.

How do we do it? Because *you show up*, too, with financial donations, volunteer hours, and supportive messages and notes.

If you made a gift to the Food Bank before, during, or after 2020, *you* are the reason we have the flexibility, endurance, and ability to respond as and when needed. Your support gives us the financial foundation we've needed to pivot and adapt.

Through November 2020, COVID-related expenditures topped \$4.8 million; 91% went toward food. We've also spent more money on fuel, freight, cold storage, and labor than anticipated.

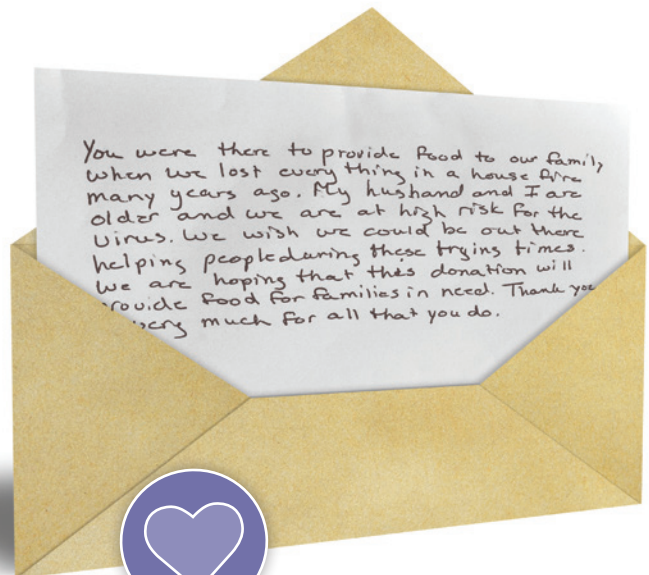
But never once in all these months have we worried whether or not we could afford to respond where and when need presented itself.

That's a gift beyond measure.

Your decision to invest your hard-earned dollars in this charitable cause is one we do not take for granted.

Your partnership signals hope that, even in the most difficult of times, we can and will continue to serve as a lighthouse and safe harbor when the waters are rough and when storms arise.

Thank you.



How do we do it?

Because you show up, too, with financial donations, volunteer hours, and supportive messages and notes.

MARCH - DECEMBER 2020

PANDEMIC ADAPTATIONS

Made possible thanks to you



- We've **waived all costs for food** so pantry partners have one less thing to worry about, through June 2021.
- We've **purchased 5.3 million pounds of food** since March 2020, a 167% increase over the same period the prior year.
- We **doubled the number of Summer Kid Packs** distributed to families with children in June, July, and August 2020.
- We **launched two new Mobile Food Pantry sites** in Culpeper and Campbell counties.
- We **partnered with health clinics to distribute COVID Food Boxes** to neighbors required to quarantine.
- We **kickstarted a public "How to Get Help" campaign** to inform people where to turn for food assistance, which has been especially important for those seeking help for the first time.
- We **acquired masks and hand sanitizer** to provide to clients and partners, and we **shared hand warmers** with pantry volunteers who will serve outdoors this winter.
- We're **working with schools across the region** to keep family-friendly foods flowing.
- We **brought on 20 new COVID recovery partners** to expand food distribution.

MONTHLY GIVING:

Sustaining and Impactful



Maybe you recently made your first gift. Maybe you've been a donor for years. Now, joining **The Supper Club** could be the right next step for you.

The Supper Club is a growing community of friends who make monthly gifts to help the Food Bank meet existing and emerging needs.

"I give monthly because, in good times and bad times, there will always be a need," explains Janet Daniel, a member since 2009 and a single mom. "Monthly donations fall right in line with my monthly budget and so are a sustainable way for me to give."

Monthly giving is impactful, too. A \$25 monthly donation provides 100

meals per month or 1,200 meals per year.

Joining The Supper Club is easy. Set up your automatic 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, the Food Bank knows how much financial support we can count on throughout the year to meet the highs and lows of client demand.

Janet adds, "As a donor and now a volunteer, I have witnessed the Food Bank's impact. The people I've met are inspiring, and I always leave my shift feeling more hopeful."



Janet Daniel, on the faculty at James Madison University, knew she could do more when the pandemic hit, so she began volunteering at the Good Food School Market in Harrisonburg and at the Food Bank's headquarters in Verona.

Sign up or learn more here:
www.brafb.org/supperclub.

Inspiring Partnerships: Resilience and Innovation During the Pandemic

In the early days of the pandemic, CEO Michael McKee reminded staff to remain focused on our mission—to provide nourishing food to our neighbors in need through vibrant community partnerships and passionate public support—and work together to adapt our operations.

Here, we shine a light on a few examples of the collaboration, resolve, resourcefulness, and inspiration we've witnessed across our service area and that demonstrate this mission in action.

Resilience is often thought of as the ability to adapt well in the face of adversity—to “bounce back.” But experts know it can also involve growth. Not only have programs and partners moved more food to more people than ever during the pandemic, but together, we've advanced food assistance in ways that will outlast the crisis.



Rockbridge Area Relief Association (RARA) innovates to help more people, maintain client choice

“What I love most is that we've been able to keep clients at the center of how we make decisions here,” says RARA Executive Director Jen Handy. “That feels so important in this moment.”

About: For nearly 50 years, RARA has helped area households meet life's basic needs: food, warmth, and shelter. They are a true bulwark, recently named the Humanitarian of the Year by the Lexington Rockbridge Chamber of Commerce.

Monthly impact: 722 households; 40,000 meals

Innovative idea: They use technology to maintain client choice, which reduces food waste and preserves client dignity. Clients use a Google Form to indicate food preferences, and volunteers pre-pack and load the selected food into their vehicles when they arrive.

Silver linings: Innovations with staying power include online client ordering, some deliveries, and the use of volunteers in nontraditional roles such as translation services.



Good Food School Market (GFSM) continues to fuel growing teens

The GFSM doesn't look like what Program Coordinator Eileen Emerson envisioned when it first launched over a year ago. Her mantra? “Don't get wedded to the program model but to the program goal.”

About: The Food Bank launched the GFSM after conversations with community partners and with financial support from the Frank P. and Arthur W. Perdue Foundation on behalf of Perdue Farms. The model is monthly distributions of food at Harrisonburg-area high schools. Numerous pivots were necessary as school instruction models and schedules changed.

Monthly impact: 225 families at Broadway High School; 200 families at Harrisonburg High School

Innovative idea: COVID-19 necessitated a pivot away from a model where students “shopped” for free groceries. Instead, we aligned monthly mobile distributions at Harrisonburg High School with the school district's meal-distribution schedule. Families drive up and volunteers load cars with food.

Silver linings: Program staff intend to preserve the flexible mindset—the willingness to try new things—and the consolidation of services to best reach families.



Healthcare partnerships provide food to COVID-19 patients in quarantine

“If the problem exists in the community, then so does the solution,” says Manager of Programs Maria Bowman, MPH.

About: The Food Bank has teamed up with healthcare groups to keep neighbors in need nourished while in quarantine for COVID-19. Food is provided free of charge, thanks to a grant awarded by Sentara Healthcare and Optima Health, in partnership with Truist and the Commonwealth of Virginia, to the Federation of Virginia Food Banks.

Monthly impact: 108 food boxes

Innovative idea: We partnered with Augusta Health, Sentara RMH Medical Center, and Sentara Martha Jefferson. While they await test results for COVID-19, patients who are low-income receive shelf-stable food boxes, a list of local pantries, and instructions for a healthy individual to pick up food on their behalf as needed.

Silver linings: The Food Bank’s partnerships with healthcare organizations accelerated this year in unexpected ways.



Impact across the service area

Much like the pandemic itself, challenges to our work have come in waves. With the help of our partners, we distributed **23.4 million pounds of food, the equivalent of roughly 18.8 million meals, from March through November 2020.**

We’ve had the systems, skills, resources, partnerships, and sheer will to pivot and continue improving along the way. And this growth mindset will help us nourish our community for years to come.

Learn more about our programs and partners here: www.brafb.org/how-we-work.



Harrisonburg High School student Christine, clocking some hours on her learner’s permit, drove up to the Good Food School Market with her father and pulled over to talk with Food Bank staff just a few feet past the busy distribution. Reflectively, she said, “This is a really hard year.” To help fuel her studies, she received potatoes, pears, peanut butter, beans, tuna, mac and cheese, rice, milk, cereal, and more. “We appreciate all the hard work to provide food for families,” said her grateful father, as he watched volunteers and school staff loading food into the long line of cars like theirs.

Not only have programs and partners moved more food to more people than ever during the pandemic, but together, we’ve advanced food assistance in ways that will outlast the crisis.



We are deeply grateful to our donors, who inspire us with gifts of their time, food, funds, and voices to help ensure that everyone has enough to eat. When we stand together, hunger doesn't stand a chance.

Across our 25-county service area, thousands of financial donors, volunteers, advocates, and friends actively support our work and have an impact in the Blue Ridge area. We appreciate every one of you! Here we highlight just a few examples of the many ways that our community stepped up in recent months.



Kroger's commitment to Zero Hunger, Zero Waste is evident throughout the year. Recently, all 10 local Kroger stores collected peanut butter to Spread the Love to area families (almost 18,000 pounds), and they collected food through the holidays to Feed the Hungry. On top of that, the company provided a valuable and generous matching gift to support our GivingTuesday campaign, which resulted in 1,244,180 meals for neighbors in need.

Friends from the **Mount Crawford Ruritan Club** stopped by our Verona warehouse with a special donation in tow: 533 pounds of fresh corn! When Rex Peters, a longtime Food Bank volunteer and Ruritan club member, learned of surplus corn at a local farm, he was determined not to let it go to waste in the fields. He and other Ruritan reps harvested the crop themselves so they could donate it to the Food Bank.



During the 2020 Great Community Give, an annual giving day organized by **The Community Foundation of Harrisonburg and Rockingham County**, enough money was contributed in just one day to provide 50,760 meals. We're grateful to everyone who participated—including our generous matching-gift partner, **Rockingham Insurance**. Save the date for the next Great Community Give on April 21.



THANK YOU, Generous Corporate Partners



*REFLECTS SIGNIFICANT GIFTS RECEIVED AUGUST 1 TO NOVEMBER 30, 2020



Whether you like to run, walk, bike, or roller skate, you can turn your fun into food for your neighbors in need. We thank the many groups who recreated their race events in the virtual world. For raising the funds to provide a collective 345,522 meals, we offer a special shout-out to organizers of the following events:

- Bishop Virtual 5K: Race Against Hunger**
- Charlottesville Women's 4-Miler**
- Green Bean Bike Challenge**
- Journey of Awesomeness**

Charlottesville Area Association of Realtors (CAAR) has been

serving central Virginia for almost 100 years, helping community members find the right homes. In 2020, CAAR took it upon themselves to help fill homes with nutritious food, too. Tapping into their wide network of realtors, lenders, and clients, they raised the funds needed to supply 80,050 meals through the Mobile Food Pantry.



MATCHMAKERS for the Mission

Part of our calling at the Food Bank is to help connect community members who want to make a difference for neighbors in need with ideas. Meet two of our newest colleagues, who are working to advance our mission.

LEIGH W. KIRCHNER
Director of Development and Donor Relations

A significant life event brought Leigh to the Food Bank, after she assessed that “I needed to do something new: something that would challenge me to do better, be better.” Leigh is writing a special blog series and invites you to follow her journey through the world of food banking. Read her first post here: www.brafb.org/meet-leigh.



JENNA DULL
Director of Individual Giving

Jenna takes inspiration from this Martin Luther King, Jr. quote: “Life’s most persistent question is, ‘What are you doing for others?’” She is thrilled to be at the Food Bank, where “we live that out daily in our mission, providing nourishing food to neighbors in need without judgment and through vibrant partnerships with so many community organizations and the seemingly never-ending support of our donors.”



Life Income for You, a Legacy of Hunger Relief for Your Neighbors

A **charitable gift annuity** can provide you and/or your beneficiary with a fixed-income stream for life, while eventually benefiting the people served by the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank.

Learn more at www.brafb.org/planned-giving or contact Karen Ratzlaff at 540-213-8404 or kratzlaff@brafb.org. All inquiries will remain confidential.



Do You Have Special Skills to Share?

Nontraditional ways to make a difference at the Food Bank

More than ever, we've been awed by the community's generosity during the pandemic. Hundreds of people have continued to show up, many for the first time, to lend a hand.

Because the Food Bank has had to adapt operations this year, we've expanded the number of nontraditional volunteer roles. If you are looking for ways to contribute to your community, consider giving back in a unique way through skills-based volunteering.

For example, if you have strong computer skills, you could enter client data into a network-wide database to help us measure reach and impact. If you are a videographer, you could record amazing moments to help us


share our messages. Perhaps you're a public speaker who can raise your voice on behalf of the Food Bank, or a leader who can conduct volunteer orientations.

Specialized volunteers make a difference! We're grateful for the 1,600+ hours they have donated since 2018.


As Specialized Volunteer Ron Wormser notes (see profile below), "My wife and I have been supporters of the Food Bank and Hunters for the Hungry for many


years But I did not realize the size and complexity of the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank's operations until I engaged as a specialized volunteer. It has been an eye-opening and enriching experience to be involved and see first-hand what it takes to accomplish the mission."

As Jennifer says, "We are always looking for ways to utilize our volunteers to the fullest extent and maximize their enjoyment and impact at the Food Bank."




Take a peek at the Specialized Volunteer catalog to review our current needs: www.brafb.org/volunteer.





If you'd like to donate your services, contact Volunteer and Food Drive Manager Jennifer Clark Robertson at jclarkrobertson@brafb.org.





Meet Ron Wormser *Pantry Technology Educator*

A former technology consultant, Ron Wormser has chosen to share his special talents and his time (500+ hours and counting) with the Food Bank since May 2018.

"I wanted to have a big impact on the Food Bank's mission," says Ron. "The Client Insight Initiative had recently been launched when I inquired about volunteer opportunities, and the Food Bank's need matched well with my skills and experience. I've met and worked with agency leaders, volunteers, pantry clients, and Food Bank staff at more than 30 agencies in the past two years and feel blessed that I could contribute to their experiences and accomplishments. It is also rewarding to be regarded as a member of the Food Bank team, even though I am not an employee."

The software enables real-time collection of client information across our network, which provides the Food Bank with key insights to improve programs and services. "From the initial roll-out to the different phases

of agency trainings, Ron has been instrumental in working alongside staff," says Volunteer and Food Drive Manager Jennifer Clark Robertson.

Ron's message to others who have skills and an interest in sharing them?

"Your modest contribution can make a big difference. Compare your skills and interests with the Food Bank's list of Specialized Volunteer opportunities. Take the next step and inquire about an opportunity. You don't have to commit until you determine it's a good match. And you can work with the team to mold the opportunity to your approach and style."

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MARKING 40 YEARS of Collective Compassion and Service

Forty years ago, while I was preparing to graduate from college, Phil Grasty was drawing up plans for the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank. At that time, food banking was a relatively new idea. Phil saw great need in our largely rural region, and he felt compelled to do something about it.

Our Food Bank started in 1981 the way every food bank started—with one compassionate person who recruited others, determined to make sure everyone has enough to eat. And 40 years later, our mission thrives because *you* have made the same decision.

Whether you volunteer your time, donate food, or make financial contributions, you are part of a community of people who consciously decide to embrace neighbors you don't know and will likely never meet. In a time when differences seem to divide us, you choose to connect with community members who are the most isolated and marginalized.

Our 40th year will be like no other. Together with our partner agencies—food pantries, soup kitchens, and shelters—and food programs throughout our service area, we are serving record numbers of adults and children. Countless volunteers are working through a prolonged pandemic and recession, setting aside their own concerns to serve others.

Compassion gave rise to the Food Bank, and 40 years later, compassion sustains the Food Bank.

Thank you for celebrating this milestone with us throughout 2021, so compassionately.



Michael McKee

Michael McKee
Chief Executive Officer

P.S. How has the Food Bank impacted you in your life? As we celebrate 40 years, we'd love to hear from you. Send a message to Chief Philanthropy Officer Karen Ratzlaff at kratzlaff@brafb.org.



**Blue Ridge Area
FOOD BANK**
Everyone should have enough to eat.



NON-PROFIT ORG
POSTAGE & FEES
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BLUE RIDGE AREA
FOOD BANK

P.O. 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
P.O. 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 22601-6312
P: 540.665.0770
F: 540.722.4217

Cover photo by OC Gonzalez/Unsplash



More People Seeking Food Assistance for the First Time

2019 VS. 2020
THE PERCENTAGE OF NEW HOUSEHOLDS
OF ALL VISITS TO FOOD PANTRIES



Thank you for helping us reach and nourish these Blue Ridge area neighbors!