

Food Bank Equips Member Agencies with New Freezers and Refrigerators



The new commercial freezer purchased by Mercer Street Friends for Crisis Ministry. Standing in front of the unit are left to right: Susan Jones, Food Bank Agency Services Coordinator; Mark Smith, Crisis Ministry Food Service Director; Debrah Pichoh, Rutgers University intern at Crisis Ministry and Shantia Loving, Mercer County Community College intern at Crisis Ministry.

The Food Bank went on a shopping spree this summer and when we were done, we had purchased three residential size refrigerators, two commercial size refrigerators, six residential size upright freezers, four residential size freezer chests and three commercial size freezers. Whew!

The equipment was bought with funding awarded to Mercer Street Friends by the New Jersey Department of Agriculture. Our grant was part of a \$1-million appropriation

earmarked in the '07 state budget, to help food pantries, shelters and soup kitchens expand their food storage capacity or upgrade food preparation equipment.

The inclusion of money to purchase the refrigerators and freezers was part of the State Food Purchase Program, a new initiative of Governor Corzine and the legislature to increase the resources available to the state's hunger relief charities and to help more hungry residents of the state access nutritious food.

Seventeen member agencies of the Food Bank received equipment from this initiative:

- Amani House
- Catholic Charities
- Community Action Service Center of Hightstown
- Concerned Citizens of Ewing
- Crisis Ministry
- East Trenton Center
- Elm Court
- Deeper Life Christian Tabernacle Church
- HomeFront
- Mount Carmel Guild
- Phoebe's Pantry at Bethany Presbyterian Church
- Princeton Deliverance Center
- Resurrection Lutheran Church
- Salvation Army Adult Rehabilitation Center
- Samaritan Baptist Church
- Trinity Cathedral
- UPI Transitional Housing

"The new refrigerator is just wonderful. Residents who are not at home when our food packages are distributed can now pick up fresh produce, chickens and meat at a more convenient time for them. Storing these perishables in the refrigerator has made a tremendous difference. Thank you."

Rhona Porter, Social Worker, Elm Court



Bella and David Vorona, volunteers with the Elm Court food pantry, show off the new refrigerator they received.

Dear Partner,

Thanksgiving will soon be here. I like Thanksgiving. I like the food associated with the holiday. I like that it gathers people together. I like that it is a celebration of community.

For twenty years, the Mercer Street Friends Food Bank has been providing food and grocery products to help feed the hungry—not alone, but as part of a community that seeks solutions to the problems of hunger and poverty. So, this Thanksgiving, I would like to express my appreciation to our community and the caring and compassionate people and organizations that join in our mission to end hunger:

The food pantries, shelters, soup kitchens and other member agencies of the Food Bank that stand steadfast on the frontlines in the battle against hunger.

Our colleagues with the NJ Department of Agriculture who work to secure federal and state funding for the food bank, as well as USDA commodities, in a shared mission to nutritiously feed the state's neediest residents.

Our food suppliers whose trailers and trucks bring us the food that helps to keep our warehouse racks filled.

The National Association of Letter Carriers who amaze and overwhelm us with the amount of food they collect from the annual "Stamp Out Hunger" food drive.

The schools, houses of worship, businesses, government offices, youth groups, etc., who sponsor and organize food drives for us.

Our donors and foundation and corporate funders whose financial support is what keeps the Food Bank going and enables us to warehouse and distribute nearly two million pounds of food.

The food retailers who allow us to raise money in their stores and NRG Energy for sponsoring Check-Out Hunger.

Our tireless and faithful volunteers who inspect, sort and box food donations; work side by side with our small staff to distribute food; conduct nutrition education classes; help raise funds and advocate for effective public policy.

On behalf of the Food Bank staff, I wish a Happy Thanksgiving to each and all.

Phyllis

TableTalk A PUBLICATION FROM THE
MERCER STREET FRIENDS FOOD BANK

Contributors: Susie Campbell, Susan Jones,
Phyllis Stoolmacher, Dave Zboray

THE ADVOCATE'S CHAIR

Welcome to our new column, *The Advocate's Chair*. In this column, we will share with you information on federal, state and local policy that impacts hunger. It is our hope that we will keep you informed on what advocacy issues Mercer Street Friends Food Bank identifies as important for our members and their consumers and also how we can all be instrumental in affecting change.

The most recent call to action has been in support of the House-passed version of the 2007 Farm Bill (H.R. 2419), which has gone on to the Senate for deliberation. The nutrition title of the Farm Bill encompasses funding for many nutrition programs including the Food Stamp Program; The Emergency Food Assistance Program TEFAP, our conduit for USDA commodities; and the Senior Farmer's Market Nutrition Program. All of these programs act as the first line of defense for the hungry.

The amount of bonus TEFAP commodities coming into New Jersey declined from \$4.3 million in FY 2003 to \$1.2 million in FY 2006 and continued to decline in FY 2007. The bill pending before the Senate increases funding for TEFAP food purchases from \$140 million annually to \$250 million annually and indexes this amount yearly for inflation. According to the Congressional Budget Office, New Jersey would receive \$2.5 million in FY 2008 and \$13.9 million between FY 2008 and FY 2012 at this level of funding.

The House version of the Farm Bill also includes an increase in the minimum Food Stamp monthly benefit, currently at \$10 a month and an increase in the average benefit, which is now only \$1.00 per person per meal. The nutrition title also raises food stamp resource limits and restores food stamp eligibility to vulnerable groups currently left out.

By the time you receive this issue of *Table Talk*, it is the hope of all hunger advocates that a strong nutrition title of the Farm bill will have been passed by Congress that includes boosting these investments in the federal food assistance programs and repairing holes in our nation's nutrition safety net.

If you would like to be on our email list for advocacy and receive notices about ways that you can help make a difference by taking action, please contact Susan A. Jones, Agency Services Coordinator and Advocate at 609-406-0503 or email sjones@mercerstreetfriends.org.

Holiday Food

Donations of turkeys and all the trimmings needed to make a holiday meal may be dropped off at 824 Silvia Street in Ewing, Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and from 9:30 a.m. to noon on Saturday, November 17.



Friends' Kitchen

Obesity has become the nation's second highest cause of preventable death (smoking remains #1). According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, nearly 23 percent of New Jersey residents are considered to be obese and another 36 percent are overweight. We also have the highest percentage of overweight and obese children under the age of five, at 17.7 percent.

To help fight this public health crisis, especially prevalent among the food insecure populations we serve, two divisions of Mercer Street Friends have teamed up to better inform and educate clients about healthy eating. *Friend's Kitchen* is a new collaboration between the Food Bank and the Mercer Street Friends Parenting and Adult Services division to teach parents participating in Mercer Street Friends CWEP (Community Work Experience Program) about good nutrition and how to prepare healthy meals at home.

Friends' Kitchen combines learning about nutrition with hands-on cooking. The first class was held in September at the kitchen of the Mercer Street Friends Cottage on Sullivan Way. Volunteer Chef Marcia Willsie of Ezekiel's Table Cooking School in Princeton and Registered Dietitian and Food Bank employee, Susan Jones, provided a cooking demonstration along with play-by-play nutritional commentary. Marcia prepared a nutritious and affordable meal of Rice with Tomatoes and Onions, Refried Beans and Fresh Caramelized Peaches using items obtained from the Food Bank and a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) farm



Chef Willsie

in Princeton. Susan discussed the importance of eating healthy, how to decrease the sodium and fat in recipes and the nutritional benefits of the meal. All participants left with a grocery bag of ingredients so they could make the same meal at home, including fresh produce and an assortment of herbs and spices.

More important, they left with knowledge about healthy and cost effective menu planning as well as some cooking skills they can put to use in their own kitchen to prepare nutritious home cooked meals for their families.

www.endhungernj.org

Department of Human Services

End Hunger NJ
a project of the New Jersey Hunger Prevention Advisory Committee

- Need Food?
- Need Help?
- Transportation Information
- Frequently Asked Questions For Clients
- Nutrition Education
- Nutritional References
- Food Safety
- Learn more About Hunger
- Donations
- Frequently Asked Questions For Providers
- Hunger Prevention Advisory Committee

The New Jersey Department of Human Services has launched this new web site filled with lots of information to help people access food, government programs and nutrition education materials, including the Food Stamp Screening Tool developed by Mercer Street Friends and the Mercer County Board of Social Services.

Jump in Food Prices Hits the Poor the Hardest

Have you been food shopping lately? Finding prices keep going up and up? The jump in food prices, not seen at this level since 1990, is due to a combination of factors. Demand for corn from the ethanol industry drove corn prices to a peak this year, raising the cost of feed for livestock, hence higher prices for beef, poultry, eggs and dairy products. Crude oil hit an all time peak this fall, which dictates not only the price of gasoline to transport food but the cost of plastic packaging. And high commodities costs have led food manufacturers to hike prices or reduce package size.

Most people who need to make adjustments to their shopping patterns because of higher prices may choose a less pricey cut of beef, decide to go for some meatless meals, pass over the packaged salad greens and precut veggies, or forgo the gourmet ice cream and so forth. For the poor and those struggling to make ends meet however, the choices are far more painful. Their adjustment means buying fewer groceries, skipping the aisles laden with fresh fruits and vegetables, choosing the cheapest food (filled with sodium, fat and sugar), cutting back on the amount of food they put on the table or just not shopping altogether.

Connecting with Our Community to End Hunger

On September 19th, national and state hunger advocates gathered at the Food Bank of Monmouth and Ocean Counties for a forum they sponsored entitled “Partners in the Fight to End Hunger”.



Pictured left to right are: Yvette Jackson, USDA Mid-Atlantic Regional Administrator, Food & Nutrition Services; Phyllis Stoolmacher, Director, Mercer Street Friends Food Bank; Vicki Escarra, President & CEO, America’s Second Harvest—the Nation’s Food Bank Network; and Charles M. Kuperus, Secretary, NJ Department of Agriculture. Missing from photo is Jennifer Velez, Commissioner, NJ Department of Human Services.

NRG ENERGY POWERS UP FOR MERCER STREET FRIENDS



NRG Energy, statewide sponsor of Check-Out Hunger, kicked off the campaign with balloons and speeches at a lunchtime gathering for their employees. NRG Energy, whose corporate headquarters are located in Carnegie Center in West Windsor, planned and organized a series of fall events for the Mercer Street Friends Food Bank including lending a helping hand at the Check-Out Hunger “Pumpkin Painting” table at Wegmans Food Market in October, running a company food drive and assembling holiday food bags at the food bank in November.



**YES! I want to help end hunger.
Here is my contribution of:**

\$50 \$100 \$250 Other _____

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Please make check payable to:

Mercer Street Friends Food Bank
824 Silvia Street, Ewing, NJ 08628

Your contribution is tax-deductible as allowed by law.



The Mercer Street Friends Food Bank is a division of Mercer Street Friends, a Quaker-affiliated, nonsectarian human care organization providing compassionate and practical solutions to the problems of poverty and health. The organization serves more than 20,000 people a year from seven locations and 15 program sites. Our programs serve infants, children, youth, parents and adults, and the disabled and elderly.

To learn about the other programs of Mercer Street Friends, please visit our web site at www.mercerstreetfriends.org



Del Monte Foods Settles Lawsuit with a Donation to Mercer Street Friends

The Mercer Street Friends Food Bank received a donation of 33,000 pounds of assorted food from Del Monte Foods as the result of the settlement of a law suit brought against the corporation by the plaintiff, Nick DeBenedetto.

Mr. DeBenedetto filed a class action lawsuit against Del Monte last year after he discovered that the nutritional information on the outside plastic wrapping that housed the four-pack StarKist tuna cans he purchased differed from the information printed on the individual can labels.

Discovery revealed that the mislabeling was not intentional and that it occurred in only a small percentage of the Multi-Packs that Del Monte sold in New Jersey. Furthermore, the nutritional information on the shrink-wrapped outer packaging, which was the information seen by consumers at the point of sale, was accurate.

Everyone agreed that it would be impossible to identify which consumers bought the erroneously labeled product. It was also concluded that damages to class members would be minimal, based on the amount of

sales and profit to the Defendant, which was determined to be \$20,000.

So, how does this all get resolved? Mr. DeBenedetto's attorney, Andrew Wolf of Galex Wolf LLC, came up with what we think was a great idea. Del Monte would donate the profit from the sale of the product, in cash or in kind to the Mercer Street Friends Food Bank. Works for us!

In late August a tractor trailer arrived at the food bank carrying 1,970 cases of assorted Del Monte, StarKist and College Inn products: tuna fish in a pouch, tuna to go kits, cut green beans, Italian style stewed tomatoes, corn, diced pears, tropical fruit, chunk pineapple in juice, spaghetti sauce traditional, spaghetti sauce with mushrooms, beef broth, chicken broth, and organic chicken broth.

Not quite the typical way we receive donations, but nonetheless, we are happy that the Plaintiff and his attorney came up with a settlement that benefits people who are poorly nourished and thought of the Mercer Street Friends Food Bank as the right place to make this happen.

Recent Grants and Awards

Church and Dwight Employee Giving Fund:

\$10,000 to support our Healthy Eating Initiatives and the distribution of wholesome and nutritious foods.

The Concordia Foundation:

\$15,000 to increase access to healthy foods for people at risk for hunger and food security.

The Karma Foundation:

\$25,000 toward the purchase and installation of a walk-in freezer.

The Fred C. Rummel Foundation:

\$15,000 toward the purchase and installation of a walk-in freezer.

Volunteer Counts

Thank you to the following groups for helping in the warehouse this summer and fall.

Number of Volunteers.....**39**
 Number of Hours.....**156**

GROUPS:

- Church and Dwight
- JusticeworX
- Mercer County Community College Video Production Students
- Princeton University – Community Action 2007

If you would like to volunteer, please call us at (609) 406-0503.



TableTalk

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MERCER STREET FRIENDS FOOD BANK

Phyllis C. Stoolmacher, Director
824 Silvia Street
Ewing, New Jersey 08628
phone: (609) 406-0503
fax: (609) 406-7328
www.mercerstreetfriends.org

CHECK-OUT HUNGER at Your Local Retailer

Oh the sights of autumn—leaves turning to red, yellow and gold, pumpkins and mums, roasted turkey and cranberry sauce and dearest to our hearts...

Yes, folks, it is that time of year again when New Jersey food and grocery retailers, along with sponsor NRG Energy, join together to raise awareness about hunger and dollars to support the work of the state's food banks to end hunger.

Along the check-out counters of participating retailers, food shoppers will find \$1, \$3, and \$5 donation slips. Each time you shop, tear off a donation slip of your choice and your cashier will scan it onto your grocery bill. It's as easy as buying a loaf of bread. **One hundred percent of every Check-Out Hunger donation in Mercer County comes to the Mercer Street Friends Food Bank.**

The money raised from Check-Out Hunger enables our food bank to keep a steady and reliable supply of food flowing from our warehouse to our network of member agencies and into communities to feed those who experience the pain and indignity of hunger.

So look for the Check-Out Hunger displays and donation slips at the cash registers in these stores (and Pennington Stop & Shop customers can donate to the Food Bank by purchasing Food for Friends paper turkeys at the store registers).

