

Food Bank Expands to Meet Growing Needs

With the pressure mounting to provide more and more food to our member agencies in response to the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, the Food Bank took dramatic action and enlarged our space by 50 percent. On May 1st we took possession of the adjacent unit and added 5,000 sq. ft. of much needed warehouse and office space, significantly expanding our ability to store and handle more food.

With room to move about, we are moving and shifting things around.

- The food sorting area has been moved into the “annex” where the volunteers who inspect, sort and rebox food donations find a considerably larger, better suited, and safer work area.



As soon as the food sorting area in the main warehouse was cleared out, the space quickly filled up with pallets of applesauce, orange juice, peaches, pinto beans, rice, and shelf stable milk, in queue for distribution to member agencies.



Within days, an opening was made in the wall between the two units, high and wide enough to accommodate our fork lift and link two separate food handling and food storage areas.

- A section has been reserved for Send Hunger Packing, our child hunger program that provides weekend food packs to ensure that children from food insecure homes have meals to eat over the weekend. The dedicated area is a much larger and better suited work area for the volunteers who sort and pack up food boxes that are delivered to the schools. Additionally, racking and shelving will be installed so we can store and always have on hand sufficient quantities of the food for the program.

On the other side of the wall, **forty-eight new slots to store palletized food has been cleared out in the area in the main warehouse** previously used for food sorting and Send Hunger Packing – and nearly all the slots are filled!

This increase in space comes at a pivotal time. The Food Bank is receiving a very substantial amount of USDA commodities as a result of the increased funding to the USDA from the 2008 Farm Bill and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act passed in February 2009. “Had we not been able to expand like this, we would have been forced to turn food away,” says Food Bank Director Phyllis Stoolmacher. “I cannot express how relieved we are to see all this food coming into our warehouse and then ever so quickly going out into the community to feed the hungry. It’s just fantastic!”

Dear Partner,

I get such a kick these days taking visitors for a tour of the Food Bank. When we enter the new "annex", the reaction is usually a "Wow". My sentiments exactly. What a difference it has made to have the additional space and be able to distribute evermore food to help feed the hungry.

To give you an idea of the impact of the expansion and what results from having more room to receive, store and distribute food, here is what wows me –

*In the 1st quarter of this year, 453,796 lbs. of food and groceries came into the warehouse...in the 2nd quarter, **this doubled to 894,988 lbs!***

Here's another one:

In April, BEFORE the expansion, we took in 251,262 lbs. of food and grocery products.

In May, AFTER the expansion, 282,372 lbs. of food and groceries made its way into the warehouse.

And in June...this grew to 361,354 lbs.

At this rate we can anticipate distributing 2.4 million pounds of food by the end of the year – 20 percent more than last year.

Quite astounding and only possible because we have the space to put the food. I shudder to think that we would be turning away much of the food had we not expanded as we did.

The increase in food supplies is attributable to a sizeable boost in federal commodities, larger amount of donations from local grocery retailers, more food drives and food collections and funding from both public and private sources for food purchasing.

So, our business is booming. Not good news, but rather an outcome of how bad things are out there.

Food is flying out our doors to member agencies as quickly as we get it in. Requests for emergency food at pantries and meal sites have jumped 30 percent or more in the past year. And we know that the number of people in need of food assistance will continue to rise as the recession lingers.

Even when the economy starts to recover, it will take quite a while before unemployment numbers start turning around.

All the more reason to be thankful that we could enlarge our space, size, reach and capacity (with much of the cost covered from funding from NRG Energy). We would have much preferred to hang the 'going out of business sign', but as long as there are people and families dependent upon the Food Bank, we will expand when necessary to meet the needs of those who experience the pain and indignity of hunger.

Phyllis

THE ADVOCATE'S CHAIR

The hot topic in Washington this summer has been health care reform, with a strong emphasis being placed on preventative care. As many of us in the hunger community already know, good nutrition has a positive impact on one's well-being, which is why health care reform and access to healthy foods go hand in hand.

This fall, Congress is due to consider reauthorization of federally funded child nutrition programs: School Breakfast Program, School Lunch Program, Summer Food Service Program, Child and Adult Care Food Program, and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (commonly referred to as WIC).

The House Committee on Education and Labor and the Senate Committee on Agriculture have jurisdiction over these programs. Representative Rush Holt, from the 12th District in our area, sits on the House Committee on Education and Labor. It is important to let it be known to him and the other committee members how important a strong child nutrition reauthorization is to our children's future.

Legislation introduced in the Senate that also addresses child nutrition includes:

The Hunger Free Schools Act (S.1343), which will help more low-income children receive school meals by simplifying the enrollment and reimbursement to schools in districts serving high populations of low-income children. All of this would translate into feeding more children breakfast and lunch, which as we all know is essential for successful school performance.

The Afterschool Meal Act of 2009 (S.990) would expand the federally reimbursed Afterschool Snack Meal Program, allowing children from all states to benefit from a nutritious meal after school.

We encourage you to contact Senator Robert Menendez (D) <http://menendez.senate.gov/> and Senator Frank Lautenberg (D) <http://lautenberg.senate.gov/> and ask them to co-sponsor and support both bills.

It is not enough to just fill a child's belly, especially if we are doing so with unhealthy food. Making an investment in our most precious resource, our children, makes sense. Making that investment now will benefit our education and health care systems in the future.

Hunger Doesn't Take a Summer Vacation... Nor Does Send Hunger Packing

Enrollment in Send Hunger Packing, the Food Bank's weekend meal program for hungry children reached 98 kids this school year. It made a huge difference in improving the well-being of the children and also their parents. One school counselor wrote:

What I am finding in the families is a sense of relief that they don't have to worry so much. It seems like the parents are more aware of the importance of the help than the children, for example, the mom who has to be hospitalized and was without an income for a month.

She further wrote about one family:

I have noticed how much livelier they are; they are eager for Fridays; they bring their bags back first thing on Monday. They tell me they are feeling good about helping their mother by being part of the program.

Knowing how the meal packs make the difference between whether a hungry child will eat or not, the Food Bank began a summer **Family Pack Program**, in



order to ensure that there would be no food shortages while school is out for summer vacation. Our volunteers are putting together bags of groceries filled with healthy food staples, such as cereal, shelf stable milk, pasta, rice, tomato sauce, tuna, fruit and vegetables. Once delivered to the respective schools, the groceries are distributed to the parents of the Send Hunger Packing children by school personnel. The pack size and quantities of food items in the Family Packs will ensure that no child or adult in the household will go hungry this summer.

Donations for Send Hunger Packing are always needed. Please select from the list below.

- Shelf stable 2% reduced fat milk 8 oz single serving size
- Individual size (single serving) cereal bowls or boxes
- Starkist Tuna to Go (or equivalent)
- Bumble Bee Tuna Salad with crackers Ready to Go (or equivalent)
- Chef Boyardee microwaveable bowls (or equivalent)
- Hormel Compleats (or equivalent)
- Campbell microwaveable soups (or equivalent)
- Peanut Butter (18 oz)
- Jif To Go (little peanut butter cups)
- Grape Jelly in PLASTIC container (14 to 18 oz)
- Yo on the Go (a yogurt smoothie drink in shelf stable brick packs)
- Individual size fruit cups, applesauce, pudding and Jell-O
- 100% Fruit Juice Boxes
- Raisins (individual size box)

LETTER CARRIERS DELIVER FOR THE HUNGRY

On Saturday, May 9th, just a few days after we took possession of the new space, the tractor trailers arrived with the food collected by members of the National Association of Letter Carriers. The food was placed this day next to mailboxes and picked up by the letter carriers as they went along their routes to collect donations for Stamp Out Hunger, their annual food drive.

At the end of the day, 50 volunteers gathered at the Food Bank and, as the US Postal Service tractor trailers rolled in,

they unloaded the donations off the vehicles and stacked postal tub upon postal tub overflowing with food.

Then came the food sorting volunteers. Over the ensuing weeks, close to 90 volunteers took on the tasks of opening the grocery bags, inspecting the contents, sorting the food and reboxing the donations for distribution to our member agencies.

Thank you letter carriers! Thank you food sorters!



Hunger in America 2009

This spring, the Mercer Street Friends Food Bank participated in Feeding America's (formerly America's Second Harvest) fifth national hunger study, the nation's largest study of domestic hunger and charitable response to it. The study, under the direction of Mathematica Policy Research, has two components: a comprehensive questionnaire completed by the agencies that receive food from food banks and a survey of clients who obtain food from these agencies. It is anticipated that results of the study will be released in early 2010.

The information learned from the study will inform the public and policy makers about the magnitude and scope of hunger in America. Findings will reveal the capacity of the charitable food distribution system to meet the needs of the hungry and provide demographic profiles of people seeking food assistance at pantries, soup kitchens and shelters.

Connecting with Our Community to End Hunger

Recent Grants and Awards

State Street Foundation – to support the Food Bank’s Healthy Eating Initiatives and nutrition focused programs.

Tenacre – for food purchases

Tyco International – for the Food Bank’s work to end hunger

Emergency Food and Shelter Program/FEMA – stimulus money to purchase food

Artist for Charity Designates Food Bank

When he is not at the Food Bank lending helping hands each week to distribute food, Tito Cascieri can be found in his studio, using the same hands to create pieces of art.

Now Tito is combining these two facets of his life. Cascieri Art will match any sales dollar for dollar up to \$500 from purchasers who mention “Mercer Street Friends”.

Cascieri Art LLC offers over 240 products on its website. Some of the products are original

creations by Tito Cascieri. There is also a large selection of reproduced work by the grandmaster artists of the past; novelty items like human and animal manikins and rock/mineral art; the opportunity to have your portrait painted digitally and an assortment of functional art such as marble coasters and battery-powered candles. To view the items, go to www.cascieriart.com or www.artistforcharity.com.

And don’t forget to mention the Food Bank!

Around the Table gourmet food store on Main Street in Pennington accepted donations for the Food Bank from customers who visited the store for a winter food tasting and sampling of products.

Donations for the Food Bank can also be made at **The Blue Rooster Bakery and Café** on Main Street in Cranbury (www.bluroosterbakery.com).

The **Robbinsville Business Networking Group** has adopted the Food Bank and collected food and funds through a series of community events including an Oscar Night Gala and an Easter Egg/Matzo Hunt.

The **Robbinsville-Hamilton Rotary** and the **Insurance Women of Mercer County** each presented the Food Bank with a donation to support our work to end hunger.

Volunteer Counts

Thank you to the following groups for helping in the warehouse during the winter and spring.

Number of Volunteers.....**168**
Number of Hours.....**605**

GROUPS:

- Eli Lilly
- Goldman Sachs
- Johnson & Johnson/ Global Transportation (Skillman)
- Mercer County Central Labor Council
- National Association of Letter Carriers
- NRG Energy Inc.
- Old Navy (Hamilton MarketPlace)
- Princeton University Student Volunteers Council
- Princeton Financial Systems- A State Street Company
- Sandoz
- USDA Food and Nutrition Service, Mid-Atlantic Regional Office

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

YES! I want to help the Food Bank meet growing needs. 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.



Leave A Legacy: Stewards of the Mission

Stewards of the Mission are individuals who have included Mercer Street Friends in their estate planning, either through including the agency in their will or establishing a deferred gift. By doing so, they are helping to ensure that the mission of Mercer Street Friends will be sustained well into the future, able to weather future economic upturns and downturns.

For more information about how you can make a difference through a planned gift, please contact Bob LeFever at 609.396.1506.

LIVE UNITED

FEEDING AMERICA

Food Bank Joins New Partnerships to Improve the Health and Well-Being of New Jersey Residents

Rutgers Against Hunger (RAH), launched in November, is a university-wide initiative to help New Jersey's hungry and addresses the problem of food insecurity through research, education, outreach and volunteerism. The initiative enlists Rutgers students, faculty, staff, alumni and the concerned public in efforts that range from collecting food and monetary donations; providing consumer education on nutrition; food shopping and preparation; to conducting research toward improving food production, packaging and distribution.

A number of the food and fundraising activities have taken place specifically to help Mercer Street Friends and the other members of the NJ Federation of Food Banks (Community Food Bank of NJ, Food Bank of Monmouth and Ocean Counties, Food Bank of South Jersey and the NORWESCAP Food Bank).

Most recently, Rutgers Against Hunger donated six refurbished computers to Mercer Street Friends, of which four are going to small food pantries that simply do not have the finances to purchase the equipment.



More information on Rutgers Against Hunger can be found at rah.rutgers.edu.

The Mercer Street Friends Food Bank was invited to join the **New Jersey Obesity Prevention Planning and Implementation Partnership**. This initiative brings together public and private agencies and organizations to collaboratively set statewide goals and implement integrated strategies to prevent and control obesity and other related chronic diseases through healthful eating and physical activity. Susan Jones, RD, the Food Bank's nutritionist will represent the Food Bank on the working group targeting behaviors that will increase consumption of fruits and



vegetables. The project, known as **A NEW Jersey...Shaping the Way We Live!**, is funded by a grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to the NJ Department of Health and Senior Services, Division of Family Health Services, Office of Nutrition and Fitness.



SHAPINGNJ
promoting healthy lifestyles

The Mercer Street Friends Food Bank has been awarded a grant by the NJ Department of Human Services as a partner organization in **"100% Insured for Sure,"** a public outreach and awareness campaign to increase enrollment in **NJ FamilyCare**, the state's health insurance program for low-income children.

NJ FamilyCare is a state and federally subsidized insurance program that provides free or low-cost health coverage for uninsured children, 18 and younger,

and low-income parents. Eligibility is based on income and household size. Children in households with gross incomes 200% of the federal poverty level or below (\$44,100 for a family of four), are insured for free. In households with incomes between 200% and 350%, there is a small co-pay and affordable monthly premium.

The benefits of NJ FamilyCare go well beyond providing access to quality health care for low-income children and their families. It also reduces food insecurity by eliminating the need to choose between paying for a prescription for a sick child or buying groceries to feed the family.

NJ FAMILYCARE

Affordable health coverage. Quality care.

To find out more about NJ FamilyCare, call 1-800-701-0710 or visit www.njfamilycare.org



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

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HUNGER PAINS: *Feeding People in Central New Jersey*



This exhibition assembled by the **Historical Society of Princeton** runs from July 21 to August 16, 2009, and highlights the work of the Mercer Street Friends Food Bank and two of our member agencies, Crisis Ministry of Princeton and Trenton and the Trenton Area Soup Kitchen. The Historical Society is also running a food drive to benefit the three organizations through August 16. The Historical Society of Princeton is located in Bainbridge House, 158 Nassau Street, Princeton. For more information about the exhibit, visit www.princetonhistory.org.

September 11 National Day of Service

The Mercer Street Friends Food Bank is taking part in **United We Serve**, a national effort launched by President Obama to engage more Americans in serving their communities this summer. United We Serve kicked off on June 22 and runs through September 11, which will be marked for the first time as a national day of service and remembrance. The Food Bank invites those who wish to participate in a service project on September 11 to contact Brian Peterson, Community Resource Liaison, at 609-406-0503 or at bpeterson@mercercstreetfriends.org.



HUNGER ACTION MONTH™
GIVE A LITTLE FEED A LOT

September is Hunger Action Month

Tuesday, September 22
Noon to 7:00 pm

Come join Food Bank staff and volunteers and help fill backpacks for **Send Hunger Packing**.

To register for this project, contact Brian Peterson, Community Resource Liaison, at 609-406-0503 or at bpeterson@mercercstreetfriends.org.