For the last 45 years, Darnell Brown has worked tirelessly to help people in Cleveland, his hometown. As the Chief Operating Officer of the City of Cleveland, Darnell works every day to ensure the city he loves so much runs efficiently and connects with its citizens.

“I've been here my entire life,” he explained, “Cleveland is home. I've seen all the changes it's been through.” Darnell truly is a veteran of Cleveland. He's worked under seven or eight different mayors in his time with the City. He spent thirty years working in public utilities before moving to the Mayor's office in 2004.

In the same year, Darnell was appointed to the Greater Cleveland Food Bank's Board after the Greater Cleveland Committee on Hunger merged with the Food Bank in 2003. “I'm the only person that's been appointed to the Food Bank Board from the City of Cleveland,” Darnell explained with a smile. “The Board has always been interesting. It's quite an eclectic group of people. We've always had a great, energetic, robust board that's always brought a passion.”
Since joining the Food Bank’s Board, Darnell has seen the Food Bank transform in many ways, but one piece he knows dearly: Harvest for Hunger.

“The Greater Cleveland Committee on Hunger ran the Harvest for Hunger Campaign,” he explained. “So, bringing that over and having that under the umbrella of the Food Bank was a good transformation.” In the last fifteen years, the Harvest for Hunger Campaign has grown tremendously. In 2019, the campaign broke records yet again, raising enough to help provide more than 22 million meals. “Every year,” Darnell said, “we set a crazy, aspirational goal and wonder – can we get there? But, we always get there. And it’s great. The Cleveland community is very giving.”

The City of Cleveland is a large part of getting to that goal. The City of Cleveland holds the largest employee food and funds drive of the Harvest for Hunger Campaign, raising more than $100,000 annually.

“It’s part of the fabric of what it means to be a city employee,” Darnell explained. “We’ve got a great group of employee campaign managers and they get it done. The City employees are great and they always step up and support.” Darnell attributes much of the success of the City’s Campaign to allowing employees to deduct donations to the Food Bank from their paychecks. “I think payroll deduction is what gets us over the hump,” he explained. In 2019, the City was presented with the Bag of Hope Award at the Harvest for Hunger Recognition Breakfast. The Bag of Hope Award is given each year to an organization that demonstrates unparalleled commitment to Harvest for Hunger. Organizations are considered for these awards based on the participation of their employees, creativity of their drive, and support of hunger relief efforts.

Beyond Harvest for Hunger, Darnell is simply proud to be a member of the Board of Directors of the Greater Cleveland Food Bank. “I’ve been on a few boards,” Darnell explained, “many of them I have a lot of affinity for. But the Food Bank is special. It’s the people. It’s the organization, it’s the culture. It’s infectious. You can’t be involved and not get caught up in the spirit of what’s trying to get done there.”
And while Darnell and his fellow Board members are pulled in different directions, he’s impressed with their commitment to the Food Bank. “These people are very busy and successful in their professional ventures, but they’re dedicated to the Food Bank,” he explained, a smile spreading across his face.

As for why he’s dedicated to the work, Darnell had powerful words to share. “When you strip everything else away, having food is really a basic right,” he explained. “If having a nutritious meal is the best way to start every day, giving folks who are already challenged the opportunity to have a good day begins with our ability to give them something that they have a basic right to.” And sometimes, he explained, it’s more than just giving a meal, it’s connecting people in need to more resources and benefits to help them become more food secure. “It’s a hand-up, not a handout.”

The Food Bank is privileged and honored to have Darnell on our Board and to be connected with the City of Cleveland in so many ways. “What we’re trying to do at the City and the Food Bank’s mission is a natural alignment,” Darnell explained. “If you look at the two largest groups with the largest need, it’s youth and seniors,” he explained, “and we’ve got plenty of both!” The City of Cleveland and the Greater Cleveland Food Bank have been able to partner to help fight hunger – especially for children and seniors, across the city, from operating summer meals programs to holding produce distributions at City Recreation Centers.

Darnell is a force to be reckoned with. His love for Cleveland and its citizens is apparent in his dedication and his hard work, not just to the Food Bank, but across the City. And he sums it up in one sentence, which he attributes to former Mayor of Cleveland Michael White, “The thing about Cleveland is if you love her dearly, she'll love you back.”