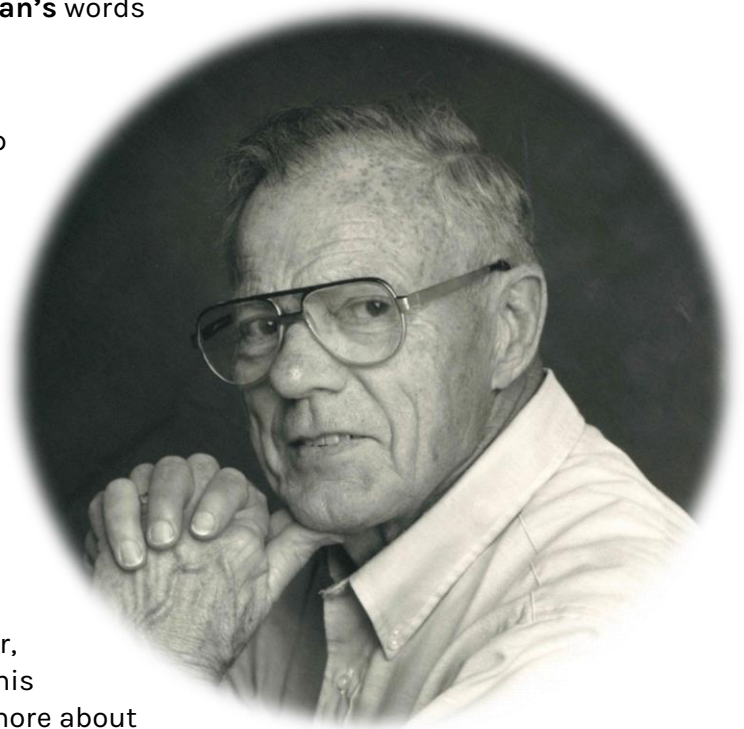


“I’m in. What’s a food bank?” **Ben Hauserman’s** words jump right off the page. Laughter and fond memories ensue.

“It looks like Dad had come back from a trip to Arizona to learn about food banks and wanted to start one,” explains Joel Hauserman, Ben’s son, as he reads through a binder from the early 1990s that includes a discussion between Ed Worley, the Food Bank’s founding Executive Director, and Ben.

And start a Food Bank they did. Ben, along with several other community members didn’t waste time. On May 29, 1979, Ben Hauserman was named incorporator of the Greater Cleveland Food Bank. On May 29, 2019, exactly 40 years later, and almost two decades after his passing, his family came to visit the Food Bank to talk more about Ben and his legacy.



“I always knew my dad was very involved in organizations. I was probably in my early to mid-20s when the Food Bank was founded,” explained Joel. Then, Ben, who had recently retired from the E.F. Hauserman Company, joined a small group of like-minded community members to bring together an organized effort to reduce food waste and ensure people in need were fed.

In 1979, there were food banks, but the oldest had been founded just ten years before. St. Mary’s Food Bank in Arizona was where Ben Hauserman and his fellow founders visited to learn more. They also spent time learning from people at Gleaner’s Community Food Bank in Detroit, Michigan, which was just two years old at the time. Using this knowledge, Ben worked to push for the founding of the Greater Cleveland Food Bank, helping to find a location, incorporate the organization, and solicit donations.

“You hardly ever got turned down for money,” stated Ed Worley in the Food Bank’s oral history. “Correct,” Ben replied simply.

Joel explains the truth behind this history. “He was very much the community liaison guy. He was always very active in talking up the company. I remember one of my cousins saying ‘your dad was not a businessman, he was the community relations guy.’ He was a very non-threatening person that a lot of people could relate to.”

Ben attended the Food Bank’s first meeting with the Cleveland Foundation in November 1979, establishing a relationship that continues today. He was also the Food Bank’s first Board Chair and chaired the Executive and Finance committees for a number of years.

Beyond his formal commitments to the Food Bank, through early Board minutes, Ben shines as a leader and decision maker. In November 1979, Ben launched the discussion to hire Ed Worley to serve as Executive Director. The next month, he helped make the final decision to move into the first warehouse, the old Meyer Dairy facility in Cleveland.



Suzanne Harff, Joel Hauserman, and Frank Harff pose with the Former Presidents of the Board plaque at the Food Bank. Ben Hauserman was the first Board Chair of the Food Bank.

“It was definitely something he believed in,” Suzanne Harff, Ben’s step-daughter, remembers. “I believe in giving food to people too and not wasting it. They’ve come up with so many ways to get the food and give it to others. We don’t realize that people don’t have meals every day.”



Suzanne still donates to the Food Bank regularly in honor of Ben, who married her mother after his wife’s and her father’s deaths in the early 1970s.

“Community service was a big part of his life. That was his thing,” explained Joel, “That’s how I think of him a lot.”

Founding the Food Bank was an incredible service, but even more than that. It was like a job! “We enjoyed the challenge,” Ben explains through the oral history, “It was a full time job. We were retired and we spent full time on the Food Bank.” And what a service to give. Ben’s legacy still lives on forty years later through the Food Bank, and the impact he helped create is larger than he could have ever imagined.

“Oh, he would just love this. I can hear him saying, ‘oh this is great,’” explains Joel. “I think the founders were proud of every place they were at. I think because of the fact that they kept moving and building and kept making these connections.

Dad's thing was, well, we just have to keep working with them little by little. He had that outlook about moving in little steps towards your goal."

Ben's small steps toward a large goal launched the Food Bank on a trajectory to becoming the largest hunger relief organization in Northeast Ohio 40 years later. Although a humble person, we know Ben would be proud. "I think he had a lot of pride that was tempered with humility about being involved in projects like this. He wasn't boastful at all, but he could say with pride that 'we did a good job,'" Joel said.

"This is amazing," Suzanne says with a gentle smile, "But, you know, everything has a beginning, and look what it can become. It's fabulous. The Food Bank is filling a huge need."

Without Ben's work, without his name on our letters of incorporation, there wouldn't be a Food Bank or an anniversary to celebrate. There wouldn't be more than 300,000 people fed each year. There would simply be more need.

