



Seeing a pile of healthy, edible food in dented cans laying in a grocery warehouse waiting to be discarded was a common site for grocers like **Dick Bogomolny** in the early 1970s. Back then, there was no system for rescuing food that was perfectly good to eat, but not fit for store shelves.

“If there was a dented can, we couldn’t sell it. If there was injured packaging, you couldn’t sell it. Grocery stores would pile the food in the back of warehouse until suppliers picked them up for credit and threw the food away,” Dick explained.

Dick was named President & CEO of Pick N’ Pay in 1975 after the beginning of his career in the food retail business. In 1975, Cleveland was in the throes of a major population shift, “from 1950 to 1980, a third of the population of Cleveland left. It went from 914,000, down to 573,000 people. It was a loss of 37% of the population,” Dick remembers. With this population shift came unique challenges. Many of the skilled workers in Cleveland left the area, leaving Cleveland with a more impoverished, unemployed population in need. And without a charitable food system in place, the need began to increase.

At the same time, prices were regulated for farmers and extra food was stored and then discarded, never making it into the hands of people in need. Grocery stores and suppliers

also had no way to get excess food to people in need. “If Stouffer’s, or any food manufacturer, made something that was a quarter-ounce light,” Dick said, “they would throw it out.”

As the population in Cleveland declined, the need increased. At the same time, grocers, farmers, and food manufacturers were unable to get excess food to people in need. It was the perfect storm in 1979. “This is the environment where Ann Marotta and her close friends decided to start the Food Bank,” Dick said with a smile. Ann was a philanthropist and deeply passionate community activist. “Ann, as I recall, was quite fanatical about it. She got it moving,” Dick explained.

One of the ways Ann got things moving was by asking Dick to get involved with the Food Bank. He agreed, understanding the need for a charitable food system in Cleveland. Then, he got to work, bringing other grocery professionals along with him. “If you’re interested at all in taking care of the community in which you are a part,” Dick explained, “you want to support



Dick’s plaque thanking him for his donation of the Food Bank’s first refrigerator

the Food Bank.” He didn’t have a difficult time selling the concept to his colleagues.

What also helped was a tax credit for businesses from the federal government for donated food. “So, if I donated,” Dick said. “I could get the gross margin back on those donations. That made a huge difference in trying to sell to store owners and company owners to take the effort and set up an arrangement with the Food Bank.”

Then, Dick remembered, “In the spring of 1981, we assisted in putting in refrigerated space at the Food Bank. I believe that was the first refrigerated space. That put us in business.” Cold storage space is vital to providing fresh, nutritious food to people in need. It’s expensive to build and maintain, but Dick’s initial gift of this refrigerated space truly made the difference in launching the Food Bank on the trajectory to where it is today. In 1981, he was honored with a plaque for his support.

Now, Dick is happily retired, spending some time on local boards like the Cleveland Orchestra and the Mt. Sinai Healthcare Foundation. As fond as he is of his memories of the early years of the Food Bank, he’s still surprised of the need in the Greater Cleveland community. “The best thing that the Food Bank could do is put themselves out of business, but that didn’t happen. It’s just gotten bigger and bigger,” Dick said.

While he feels saddened about the increasing need in the community, Dick is happy with the work done by the Food Bank. “I look at it from the outside. The Food Bank is doing a job that needs to be done. Somebody has to do it – and they’re not only doing it, but they’re doing it in a superior fashion. I think the Food Bank is essential to this community,” he says with a satisfied smile. Without Dick’s early work during the founding of the Food Bank, there would be no Food Bank providing essential services to the community.

As a board member for the Mt. Sinai Healthcare Foundation, Dick is interested in health care and he believes that the Food Bank’s future will be deeply tied to health and medicine. “There isn’t a disease that isn’t influenced by diet,” he explained. No matter how good the doctors are, if people don’t look at their diet, they won’t get better.” The Food Bank’s Food as Medicine Initiative seeks to address the root cause of many illnesses – diet. By partnering with local healthcare organizations to reach low-income patients with healthy food, the Food Bank is beginning to address this need.

From the grocery aisle to the board room, Dick Bogomolny has been able to have an incredible impact on the Greater Cleveland community. Without his leadership and support, the Food Bank would not have had early support from so many food retailers, something that still continues today.



Dick stands outside the Food Bank’s cold storage area.



Dick Bogomolny and Kristin Warzocha