



Greater Cleveland
Food Bank



Tom Greiner's story doesn't start in Cleveland. It starts in Detroit. In the 1977, the Gleaner's Community Food Bank was founded in Detroit, Michigan. "I used to drive up there and be a part of it," Tom explained, "That was the beginning of the concept of surplus food and how to gather it and distribute it." Before his integral role in founding the Greater Cleveland Food Bank, Tom was also a part of that founding of Detroit's food bank.

But Tom's story doesn't start in 1977 either; it starts in 1970. He explained, "In 1970, Cleveland was at the peak of industry and population. The downtown area was still strong. The steel mills were along the river. It's hard to envision that between 1970 and 1979 all of this changed. And the steel mills closed."

Suddenly, in less than a decade, Cleveland, one of the most prosperous cities in the nation, found itself in need. Its people found themselves in need.

Similar things were happening in Detroit. And, despite their hard work, small church agencies couldn't keep up with rising need. And national food donors couldn't find a way in to help. "So, the guys in Detroit got the idea to get a warehouse. And that was the beginning of the concept of 'food bank,'" Tom explained.

While Tom was interested in starting a food bank in Cleveland, he wasn't sure the structure was there. Then, Ben Hauserman walked into his office.



Jones & Laughlin Steel
Mill, Cleveland, August
1970

"While I was working with Detroit, Ben and I were on the Boy Scout National Board together. He went to a national meeting in Phoenix, Arizona and he saw St. Mary's Food Bank," Tom

remembers. St. Mary’s was founded 51 years ago and is the oldest food bank in the country. Ben’s visit to Arizona inspired him and he began talking with other people about creating a Food Bank in Cleveland.

Soon, Ben Hauserman, along with Ann Marotta, another Greater Cleveland Food Bank founder, decided to visit the Gleaner’s Food Bank in Detroit to learn more about starting a food bank in Cleveland. In Detroit, Ben and his colleagues met with a woman who was married to a fellow Boy Scout National Board member.

Tom explained, “She said, ‘what are you doing here?’ Ben said, ‘we came here to learn about food banking. We want to have a food bank in Cleveland.’ She said, ‘the man that helped us is in Cleveland!’” That man was Tom Greiner. Both Ben and Tom had interest in starting a food bank, but they had never spoken about it to each other!



Tom with the Food Bank’s founding Executive Director, Ed Worley

“One day, I was in my office in the Hanna Building,” Tom remembers, “and Mr. Hauserman opens the door and walks in and said to me, ‘you never told me about food banking! We need one in Cleveland,’” Tom said, laughing. “I said, ‘In Cleveland, I don’t know.’ He said, ‘well, we’re going to do it! Will you come to a meeting on Thursday, for lunch, at the Union Club?’” Tom agreed.

Tom, Ann Marotta, Ben Hauserman, Rollie Smith, and Bill Coquilletette met weekly for a year. Others came along, including Kay Weizer, Ed Worley, and other key stakeholders in the establishment of the Food Bank. Those weekly meetings built the Greater Cleveland Food Bank, piece by piece.

In July 1979, the Food Bank was incorporated, but there was still more work to be done. Tom remembers, “The Food Bank took on a mission of support to the community. Not to direct the community, but to support the initiatives of the agencies and the people on the front lines. We said we would never interfere with the service providers providing food directly to the people.” But, despite this viewpoint, Tom and his colleagues were concerned that the people engaged in the fight against hunger on the front lines would not welcome the Food Bank.

So, Tom and his fellow founders held a meeting. Tom remembers it like it was yesterday. “The room was full of people representing agencies. So, Sister Henrietta, who ran the hunger center in the Hough Neighborhood, stood up on a table, and said, ‘If you will feed the needy, and not the greedy, we will support you.’ And we said, ‘you are the eyes and ears of the community. You tell us!’ We always stressed that we are here to help you, support you, and make this happen,” Tom remembers. “Then, Otis Moss from Olivet Baptist Church gets up and endorses the Food Bank. He said, ‘I will support this, I will stand with you. Our community will come together with you.’”



“Those two people are the reason that the agencies supported us. It wasn’t anything we did. It was the leadership from the agencies. And that was the beginning,” Tom stated.

With the support of partner agencies, the Food Bank launched and started towards where we are now – working to ensure everyone in our communities has the nutritious food they need every day.

But even beyond the Gleaners Community Food Bank in Detroit and the Greater Cleveland Food Bank, Tom worked on a national level to help establish Second Harvest, now known as Feeding America. Tom worked as a consultant helping John Van Hengel and other Food Bank leaders establish the national organization in the early 1980s. Tom remembers, “Second Harvest started at a meeting in Detroit when five food banks shook hands. Baltimore, Cleveland, Detroit, Santa Clara, and Phoenix.” Now, Feeding America provides support to more than 200 food banks across the country.

Tom is proud to be a part of the founding of not just the Greater Cleveland Food Bank, but also the Gleaners Community Food Bank in Detroit. But, although he is happy to see the Food Bank as it is today, that wasn’t his goal in 1979. “If you go back 40 years ago, we thought this was temporary. We were going to help these people during this transition,” Tom says, recalling the difficult economic times felt in Cleveland in the late 1970s.

However, as the need in Cleveland remained high and the Food Bank continued to be called upon for help, Tom and his colleagues eventually realized that their temporary solution might not be so temporary. “When we knew we had to build a building and become a permanent fixture in the community, that’s when I knew it was permanent,” Tom said.



Kristin Warzocha and Tom Greiner

And in the next forty years, Tom sees the Food Bank continuing to be the heart of the Cleveland Community, “the Food Bank is going to continue to look for partners,” he explained.

Without Tom Greiner, people in need in Cleveland and Detroit, and across America would not have food banks to rely on. His passion for the work is evident, even forty years later. We’re grateful for his leadership and commitment to fighting hunger – and for not kicking Ben Hauserman out of his office in the 1970s.