

Summer 2021

FOOD — for — THOUGHT



Greater Cleveland
Food Bank

Glenn, client at the
Muni Lot Distribution

Making Beauty Out of a Blank Canvas

This former painter retired to care for his wife, who is in poor health. Thanks to you, their future is bright!

Glenn worked for years as a painter, making the world a more colorful, beautiful place. But when his wife was diagnosed with kidney disease, he decided to retire and spend his time caring for her. Little could he have imagined that not only his life but the whole world was about to turn upside down.

"I had just retired because of my wife's illness, and then COVID-19 hit," he says. "Our way of life has been changed a lot. It has been heavy."

But despite their worries over medications and bills, one thing he hasn't had to worry about is food. He heard about the Food Bank's Senior Box Distribution program a year ago and has been a regular visitor to pick up the foods they need to maintain their health.

"I get a lot of things because I have a very sick wife. She needs juices and healthy food. This helps us a lot so we can get by. It's very much appreciated."

Glenn is grateful for the help he and his wife receive from the Senior Box Distribution program and would like donors and volunteers to know how thankful he is. "It's a beautiful thing to know that somebody else out here understands and feels our pain ... that they see that we don't have [enough]. Thank you."

As the pandemic continues to make life challenging for so many families, seniors like Glenn and his wife remain especially vulnerable. Your help ensures they can get the food they need to support their health while following safety precautions to limit their interactions.

Food For Thought

Kristin Warzocha
President & CEO



I never cease to be amazed by the creativity of others – including my neighbors here in Northeast Ohio. In fact, that's what we're celebrating in this issue: the resilience and creativity of our local community!

It's been amazing to see how quickly we have adapted to serving our community in new and different ways. Whether that's through local mobile pantries like the one at New Mount Zion Baptist Church (page 3) and innovative partnerships with the Cleveland Kids' Book Bank (page 5) or improving our internal process using our new Flow Wrapper (page 7) and finding new ways to get food into the hands of hungry children as schools have been out (back page).

I also want to highlight what an extraordinary difference it has made for us to have members of the National Guard stationed here this past year (page 6). We literally would not have been able to offer this high level of service – providing 9 million more pounds of food and serving 100,000 more people year over year – without their hard work! Their partnership has made it possible to implement creative distribution methods during the pandemic like drive-thru distributions with emergency food boxes.

We know that hunger is often a symptom of another problem ... most often employment, housing, or healthcare. As a community, one way to end hunger is by not only providing the people we serve with nutritious food, but providing connections and resources to other nonprofits who can address some of those root causes.

The Food Bank continues to plan and problem solve in order to better increase the future food security of our neighbors. Treating people who are struggling with respect, kindness and empathy is one of the most important things the Food Bank and our partners can do.

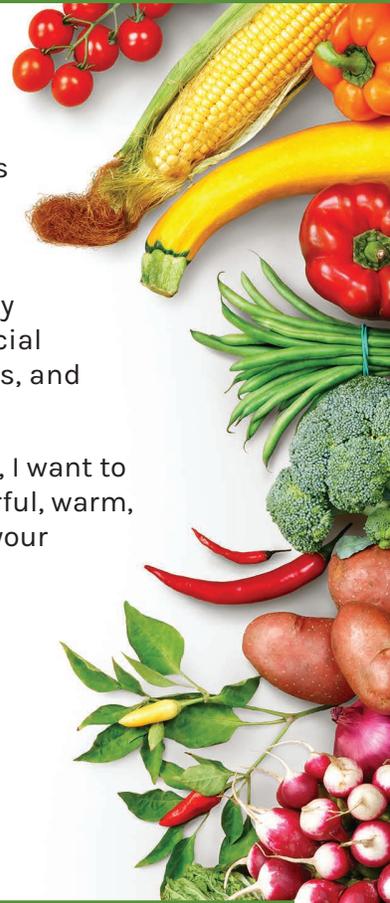
Our ability to step up and provide more meals and support during this crisis is all because of

our community's willingness to make that possible. And the only way we can continue to help our hungry neighbors is with community support in the form of financial gifts, hardworking volunteers, and advocacy support.

From the bottom of my heart, I want to thank you and all our wonderful, warm, generous, caring friends for your compassion and creativity.

With gratitude,

Kristin Warzocha
President & CEO



If you or someone you know needs help, we are here for you! Call our Help Center at 855.738.2067 or visit our website at greaterclevelandfoodbank.org to:

- Find a location near you to get food.
- Apply for SNAP or other programs.
- Be connected with a nonprofit partner to help address the issues underlying hunger.
- And much more!



New Mount Zion Baptist Church Mobile Pantry

Since their first distribution, the mobile pantry at New Mount Zion Baptist Church has distributed over 750,000 pounds of food to the community.

When thinking about why they started holding the monthly produce distributions, Almeida Dye, the site coordinator, said "Our Pastor, Dr. William H. Myers, and our family at New Mount Zion Church believe that it's important to be there for the community. **The mobile pantry is needed in the community as some people use it as a means to survive.**"

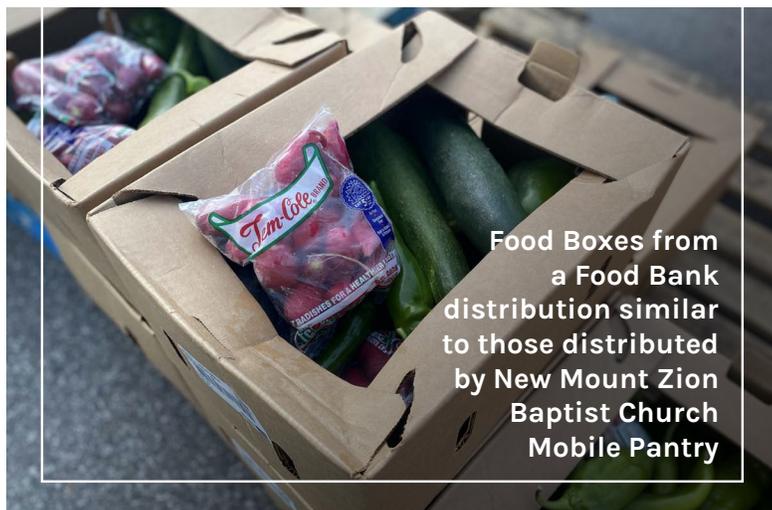
Volunteers at the church know that these distributions are greatly needed, as the pandemic has put additional strain on families. Dye notes that "with this pandemic, the cost of living has gone up, especially the cost of food. If we're able to help families with some of that burden, then that's what God would want us to do."

In addition to giving out the fresh produce every month, members of New Mount Zion Baptist Church provide other important materials for those who attend the distribution, including information about SNAP benefits, voter registration, and upcoming community events.

Recently, the members were able to pass out wellness kits that were donated by local students. **These kits included stress balls, coloring books, and journals to help alleviate some of the stress the pandemic has brought on for so many people.**

The Mobile Pantry at New Mount Zion Baptist Church is held on the 4th Saturday of the month from 10:00 am until 11:30 am, all year long.

When asked about why she enjoys participating in the mobile pantry program, Dye said, "I love giving back to my community, [and] doing it with my church family surrounded by others whose spirit brings them to help others is the ultimate reward."



Food Boxes from a Food Bank distribution similar to those distributed by New Mount Zion Baptist Church Mobile Pantry

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Almeida Dye, site coordinator



AJC American Jewish
Committee

Thank you to the American Jewish Committee of Cleveland for Honoring Us With the 2020 Isaiah Award for Human Relations

On Friday, April 16, 2021, the Greater Cleveland Food Bank was presented with the 2020 Isaiah Award for Human Relations by the American Jewish Committee (AJC) of Cleveland. This distinguished award recognizes a Cleveland area nonprofit that meets AJC Cleveland's mission of building bridges of understanding to improve our community.

"The 2020 Isaiah Award for Human Relations recognizes an organization that exhibited dedication, attention, and commitment to the Greater Cleveland community before, throughout, and beyond this pandemic," said the Isaiah chair, David Hexter. "We have been amazed by the ways in which the Greater Cleveland Food Bank adapted so quickly to the growing needs of the Cleveland community."

"2020 was not typical," he said, adding that staff and volunteers had to figure out how to distribute an additional 9 million pounds of food to 62,000 new households, "much of the increase due to COVID-19."

Kristin Warzocha, President and CEO of the Greater Cleveland Food Bank, echoed that sentiment, saying, "The economic issues caused by COVID-19 have made our challenges even worse."

"Now, one in six people are food insecure, not knowing where their next meal will come from. Sadly, Cleveland has the highest poverty rate of

any large city in the U.S., and more than one in four senior citizens in the Cleveland area are at risk for hunger. The people hit hardest by this pandemic are women, people of color, and low-wage workers – constituencies we have been serving for years. A person of color is more than twice as likely to be food insecure. That's unacceptable."

As we continue to respond to the overwhelming need in the wake of this ongoing crisis, we remain committed to ensuring that everyone in our community gets the nutritious food they need – regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, or any other identity.

It is truly an honor to be recognized by this wonderful organization and our friends at the American Jewish Committee of Cleveland. This award is a real testament to our whole Food Bank family's generosity, hard work, and commitment. From our staff and program partners to generous donors and volunteers, the efforts recognized by AJC Cleveland would not be possible without your support. Thank you!

Partner Spotlight: Cleveland Kids' Book Bank Well Read, Well Fed

One of the greatest gifts you can give a child is literacy – opening the door to a lifetime of learning and imagination. That's why the Cleveland Kids' Book Bank (KBB) has distributed more than 2.9 million free books to 100,000+ children in Greater Cleveland since it was founded in 2016.

The mission of the KBB is to foster improved literacy and a love of reading – particularly in underserved areas where boys and girls might have not as much access to books and educational materials. They strive to ensure that every home in our community has books that will engage and excite both children and their families.

The KBB collects donated books and purchases books, they then work with volunteers to help sort and pack those books for distribution to community partners.

Throughout the pandemic, they have been continually thinking of new and creative ways to serve local families. They began to look at distributions with fresh eyes – and behold, a

terrific partnership with the Greater Cleveland Food Bank was created!

To make book ownership as easy as possible for children, KBB started a program called Meeting Families Where They Are and partnered with food pantries to help hand out books during their distributions. In the last months of 2020, the Food Bank distributed more than 36,000 books along with food at the Muni Lot.

The Food Bank is proud to be one of the more than 1,000 partner organizations that work with the Kids' Book Bank to provide free books to the kids we serve. Thanks to the support of community partners like you, we are providing kids with the food they need to nourish their bodies ... and the books they need to nourish their minds and imaginations!



Thanks to Our Hardworking Friends From the National Guard!

During this ongoing pandemic, the support of our fellow National Guard members has been an invaluable resource to the Food Bank. They have spent an incredible amount of time serving families struggling with hunger throughout Northeast Ohio – working more than 130,000 hours since the crisis began!

Jeremy Pitoniak, Director of Operations here at the Greater Cleveland Food Bank, shares his experience working with these dedicated men and women:

"We simply would not be able to do everything that we are doing operationally without the National Guard's assistance. There are so many ways they contribute behind the scenes that make it possible for us to distribute food at these levels. We even had one member who was hired to the Food Bank receiving team after his deployment was over!"

The one thing that struck me is just how incredibly positive all of the National Guard members have been about this assignment. They have been professional, flexible, and hardworking. I have been told so many times, 'Just tell us what you need, and we will get it done.' And they gladly do it!"

Though we're no longer relying on as many National Guard members as we did when the pandemic first began – the number serving has dropped from 80 people during the first few months after the initial rush to about 49 helping us currently – we still depend on their amazing assistance. We are enormously grateful to Governor Michael DeWine who deployed National Guard soldiers to food banks across Ohio at the request of the Ohio Association of Foodbanks.



We are so thankful for every member of the National Guard who has selflessly supported us during this time of increased demand. It has been incredible to see how people from all walks of life have committed their time and talents to help one another and keep families from going hungry!



Getting in the Flow with Our New Flow Wrapper!

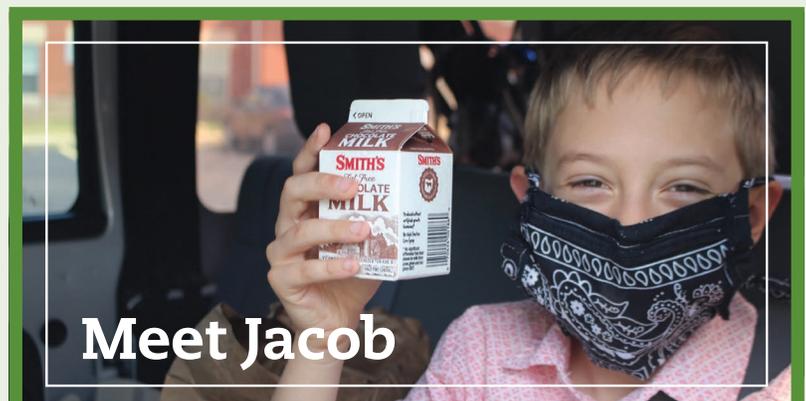
This new machine allows us to wrap our kids' boxed lunches in plastic, keeping them fresher and easier to transport!

If you're ever at the Food Bank in our kitchen, you might meet Rod McGuire, our Director of Food Resources. He leads the Greater Cleveland Food Bank Kitchen operations – preparing meals for child nutrition programs, senior programs, and our partner agencies. One of the items on his "wish list" the last several years has been a Flow Wrapper, so he was thrilled when we recently received one, thanks to a gift from a generous donor.

This packaging equipment allows us to wrap items in plastic – keeping everything neat, sealed, and protected. We're currently using it to wrap box lunches for our kids' programs, and this machine is fast!

The Flow Wrapper has increased our capacity to produce more meals in less time – using fewer volunteers. It can wrap 35-40 meals per minute and 10,000 cold lunches in about six hours of volunteer time ... about three times faster than even our best volunteer group could do! It also allows us to see inside the package and attach a label clearly, so we know exactly when it was packed and can read the complete ingredient list.

Rod describes the machine as "the wave of the future!" with a big grin. He already has plans to expand its usage to include frozen senior meals and other projects that will allow us to expand our capacity and productivity moving forward.



Meet Jacob

We met Jacob recently at one of our drive-thru distribution events. This 8-year-old boy was there with his father, picking up one of our boxed lunches that was packaged by volunteers using our new Flow Wrapper!

As we chatted, Jacob told us, "My favorite food is spaghetti. I also love apples. This lunch makes me feel good."

The day he chatted with us from his car, Jacob cheerfully dug into his lunch to discover a sandwich, chocolate milk, and a new mask, which he proudly showed off in his photo.

"This is really awesome you guys are doing this," said his dad. "Tell them how happy it makes you."

"Really happy because I get to have free food," Jacob said.

"It's exciting, right?" his dad chimes in.

"Yep," Jacob said with a big grin. "Thank you!"

Hunger Doesn't Ease Up When School's Out for Summer ...

If there's one thing Diana Davet, our Director of Programs is passionate about, it's seeing that growing kids get the food they need to succeed. Every day, she works hard at the Food Bank to refine and adapt our programs to ensure we reach the maximum number of children with the freshest, healthiest food.

Diana oversees our four Children's Nutrition Initiative Programs:

- **School Markets** bring a mobile truck of healthy food to schools once a month for students and their families.
- **The Backpack for Kids program** provides kids with shelf-stable food to take home so they can eat over the weekend.
- **Kids Cafés** are located at schools and nonprofit after-school programs to provide children with nutritious meals.
- **The Summer Feeding program** provides breakfasts and lunches to kids during the summer when they have limited or no access to school feeding programs.

As we enter the busy summer months, our main priority is getting food into the hands of children who would otherwise go hungry. We are planning to provide meals to 65-75 regular summer feeding sites this year.

In addition, we will again have two food trucks going around to about 16 sites this summer. Each child who visits can receive five days worth of food. We can also provide SNAP application assistance and other referrals for families, as needed.

One program that has skyrocketed since the pandemic began is our Backpack program. We were operating Backpack programs at 66 sites during the second semester – the most we've had in four years! Between March 2020 and March 2021,



more than 220,000 bags of food were distributed through this program. We have also been distributing Farm to Family and Emergency boxes at Backpack distributions, so the entire family is getting healthy food.

Though we've had to change the way we serve kids and families struggling with hunger in Northeast Ohio, one thing hasn't changed ... the commitment of friends like you. Your unwavering support has provided the resources we've needed to continue to lend a helping hand to families. Thank you for caring this summer and all year long!



**Greater Cleveland
Food Bank**



Greater Cleveland Food Bank

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