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# SPECIAL INGREDIENTS

A Publication of The Food Bank for Central & Northeast Missouri

**SPRING 2021**



## Providing Hope One Box at a Time

### The Food Bank creates new way to supply fresh produce

Before COVID-19, The Food Bank faced a challenge in effectively distributing fresh produce in a variety. Last spring, we found our solution with Produce Boxes, packing a myriad of nutritious food in one easy-to-take box.

Providing healthy food to families is key to our mission. Previously, The Food Bank sent our partner agencies fresh produce in large pallets. Often, each pallet only carried one type of fruit or vegetable. That meant if a partner agency received two pallets of produce, there would only be two types to provide to the community, like apples and lettuce. While still providing nutritious food, this method lacked the variety we want to provide to people.

In 2020, the USDA created the Farmers to Families Food Boxes to respond to COVID-19. The temporary program worked with food banks to distribute boxes of fresh produce, milk, dairy foods and meat — the variety of items The Food Bank always wanted to provide in a single package. **By the end of August in 2020, the program was so popular more than 1.98 million boxes were distributed through it.** With lessons learned through Farmers to Families and changes to our Buddy Pack Program that reduced its volunteer needs, The Food Bank had the time and knowledge to dedicate to its new effort: Produce Boxes.

Through partners like Aurora Organic Dairy and the Moberly Walmart Distribution Center,

*Continued on page 3*

### In This Issue



pg 2

Improving Our Work  
Through Lessons Learned



pg 3

Volunteers Return  
to The Food Bank



pg 4

Celebrating Nina Porter's  
Life of Service



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# Lessons Learned from Sharing Food in a Crisis



The Food Bank has seen no challenge like the COVID-19 crisis. It did not just bring an increase in the need for food assistance; it demanded complete structural changes to how The Food Bank and its partners functioned. We needed to work more safely and efficiently than ever. It has not been easy, but now we are stronger and wiser as an organization and even more dedicated to working to end hunger in our communities.

We reinvented the Buddy Pack Program in 2020 to deal with the reduced volunteer force at The Food Bank. Instead of sourcing items individually and packing them in our Volunteer Room, we began purchasing Buddy Packs pre-packaged. This raised the cost of each pack, but included multiple improvements, like allowing us to obtain healthier food in a greater variety. The new Buddy Pack has been so well received, we made the change permanent, increasing the program's effectiveness now and in the future.

By reducing the Buddy Pack Program's labor needs, The Food Bank has been able to refocus its volunteer force to other efforts. Most important among them is our new Produce Box initiative. Volunteers are now turning various bulk produce into boxes containing multiple items, making them easier for our partner agencies to handle and more enjoyable for people getting assistance. **This year, we have set a goal of distributing 60,000 Produce Boxes across our service area, and we will likely reach it.**

**Our Mobile Pantry Program expanded significantly last year, serving 86,479 people.** It was a crucial part of our pandemic response, and it proved how important the program is in providing help where it is most needed. Because of that, we will be maintaining the growth of our Mobile Pantries in 2021.

The examples above represent just some of the lessons The Food Bank learned while responding to COVID-19. I could go on almost indefinitely with the improvements we have made, like growing the Senior Box and VIP Veteran Pack Programs. We faced a test, and we responded by finding creative approaches and solutions. The Food Bank has much to be proud of, and so do you, our supporters, for making it all possible.

Gratefully,

Lindsay Young Lopez  
President and CEO

# Volunteers Return to The Food Bank

When Jackson Hoover started volunteering at The Food Bank earlier this year, he quickly set a goal for himself: reach 100 hours served. One month later, he had already hit 52 hours, making Jackson one of the standout faces in the return of our volunteer program.

After nearly seven months without one of our operation's most crucial resources, The Food Bank is welcoming back volunteers. With a number of COVID-19 policies in place to ensure safety, people are making an impact by giving time again.

**"It's pretty different from any other volunteer experience I've had," Jackson said. "I feel really appreciated at The Food Bank ... I really enjoy the people and the staff."**

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, The Food Bank made the decision to drastically reduce our volunteer numbers to keep people safe. The most common volunteer opportunities, like those in our Volunteer Room, were outright suspended. Since we heavily rely on volunteers to repackage and distribute food, the decision created a major hurdle in The Food Bank's operation when the work to be done was at an all-time high. Thankfully, members of the Missouri National Guard jumped in with additional hands, along with temporary workers who were funded through a grant from the Missouri Foundation for Health. **In 2019, The Food Bank had 15,120 volunteers who worked 106,260 hours. Because of the support of the National Guard, The Food Bank was able to maintain and even expand its operation in 2020 with only 5,046 people serving 63,955 hours.**



In November of last year, The Food Bank started reintroducing volunteers with safety precautions in place. In 2021, The Food Bank is slowly bringing in more and more volunteers who will help us repackage and distribute food. As the call for more volunteers is heard and people once again feel safe, The Food Bank continues to see an increase in volunteer support. At the beginning of February, we saw an average of eight volunteers per shift. In March, there was an average of 10 volunteers per shift, and the numbers are expected to continue to grow. The return of The Food Bank's volunteers will be crucial to our success in 2021, and we're incredibly grateful for all who give their time to our mission.

**People interested in volunteering can sign up at [sharefoodbringhope.org/volunteer](https://sharefoodbringhope.org/volunteer).**

## Providing Hope One Box at a Time continued from page 1

The Food Bank is able to secure the regular source of produce and dairy needed to supply the initiative. Last fall, we started distributing nine items per Produce Box, with most including milk, fresh fruits, vegetables, and shelf-stable products such as rice, beans, pasta and sauce.

Another benefit to the Produce Box initiative is how sustainable and efficient it is. We can sort all of the different food items at The Food Bank and

ensure waste that can be recycled is recycled. By using our volunteers to sort these items, we free up more time for the soup kitchens, food pantries and other organizations with which we work.

**The Food Bank's goal is to distribute 60,000 Produce Boxes by the end of 2021. This would mean supplying thousands of families with an enjoyable variety of healthy, fresh food.**



# Celebrating Nina Porter's Life of Service

WOMAN RUNS SMALL PANTRY FOR TWO DECADES

Partner agencies and those who run them are at the heart of The Food Bank's work. Our mission is impossible without these incredible partners and selfless leaders. No person embodied the dedication found at these food pantries, soup kitchens and others more than Nina Porter, who helped feed her community for more than 20 years.

Through The Food Bank's partner agencies, we serve 100,000 people a month throughout 32-counties. We're proud to work with these organizations who develop a relationship with their communities through consistent care and a desire to help.

**Nina was the steady soul behind the First Baptist Church Food Pantry in Canton. Her work as coordinator of the pantry ensured food-insecure people in Canton had a reliable place to get help.**

Last November, Nina passed away at 79-years old. Those who knew her said it's no wonder why she helped feed her community. She grew up in a family of eight where food was lacking. **"She was always the type of person that if we were having a meal for five people she made enough for 15 people,"** said Chad Porter, one of her five children.

As the coordinator at the food pantry, Nina ordered food online, organized items by splitting donations into family units, managed the flow of the pantry,

handled paperwork, and so much more. The Food Bank's delivery truck came on Tuesdays, and she hosted the distribution on Friday once a month. Then, after Friday, they took it all back down.

**Pat Franks, the secretary at First Baptist Church, was friends with Nina for 55 years. "She was wonderful," Franks said when remembering how they would set up the pantry. "She would say, 'Honey, could you help me? I would, you know, I would really appreciate it ...' She was a real servant. She's always been like that."**

**“She was one of a kind. She was special.”**

*Pat Franks*

Sundays were busy for her as well. Porter was a Sunday school teacher, a vacation bible school teacher and part of the hospitality committee. After church, she always had her family and sometimes other people at their house for Sunday dinner. She didn't always know who was coming but she always made enough food just in case.

A few years ago, Porter retired, and The Food Bank celebrated our appreciation for her. Soon after, the food pantry closed and moved to another location. Thanks to Nina, more than 250 to 300 families were served monthly.

## Food Bank Events Return with Hope for Heroes 5K

It's been over a year since The Food Bank canceled its first event made impossible by the COVID-19 pandemic. With normalcy slowly returning, the Hope for Heroes 5K will be our return to in-person events, and The Food Bank invites all supporters to join us.

Sponsored by Columbia Insurance Group, the run and walk will begin at 7:30 a.m. on June 26 at Cosmopolitan Park in Columbia. We will use staggered start times and require runners to follow other health guidelines to ensure safety for participants and volunteers. Hope for Heroes will also include a virtual option for people unable to attend the day of the event or still looking to participate from a place of their choosing.

Visit [sharefoodbringhope.org/hope5k](https://sharefoodbringhope.org/hope5k) to register today.



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