

FOODBANKFOCUS

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AKRON-CANTON REGIONAL
**FOOD
BANK**

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akroncantonfoodbank.org

MAIN CAMPUS

350 Opportunity Pkwy
Akron, OH 44307

STARK COUNTY CAMPUS

1365 Cherry Ave. NE
Canton, OH 44714

SERVING 8 COUNTIES

Carroll, Holmes,
Medina, Portage, Stark,
Summit, Tuscarawas &
Wayne Counties



Every meal has a story. Meet Helen.

In 2020, Helen was diagnosed with cancer. Her world turned upside down in what seemed like a blink of an eye. Before getting sick, she owned her own window cleaning business. She never needed to visit a food pantry for herself and didn't receive SNAP food benefits.

Helen's initial cancer treatments began in the morning and lasted into the evening. Not only did she no longer have time to work, but she was too ill for physical labor. One day, while driving down the street after a treatment, she saw a long line of cars waiting to receive food from a drive-thru food pantry.

She started visiting the pantry to help make ends meet while she navigated a new budget and lifestyle. The food pantry provided her with fresh fruits, vegetables, meat and pantry staples. But it also provided her with new friendships and support.

"This place has been here for me in my lowest of lows and my highest of highs," she said. "This place has a real special place in my heart."

Helen is still receiving cancer treatments and surgeries. She has struggled to find a job willing to work with her treatment schedule. When she needs a little help with groceries, she knows the pantry is there for her with open arms.

Throughout her emotional health journey, Helen has remained positive. When she has the time, she helps volunteer at the same pantry that supports her.

Helen says to supporters of the Foodbank and local hunger relief, "I love you. Thank you. If the world worked together like this food pantry, it would be a better place."

“

We were born and raised in Akron. Our kids were raised here, and our grandchildren are being raised here. Giving locally requires participation because it's in our own backyard.”

*Dave and Cheryl Venarge
Philanthropists*



Local family makes significant impact for Foodbank

The Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank is extremely grateful to call Dave and Cheryl Venarge good friends. Their extensive commitment to hunger relief compelled them to make a significant donation to the Foodbank's capital campaign, with the new onsite food pantry at the Main Campus in Akron being named in their family's honor. Dave and Cheryl also established an endowment fund, helping to ensure their faithful support to the Foodbank will continue in perpetuity.

The new pantry, now open, is named The Venarge Family Food Pantry & Resource Center. It will serve families with groceries and other support services through community partnerships.

“Having the pantry named after our family is a legacy we can be very proud of, all the way through our grandchildren and those who come after them,” said Cheryl.

The Venarge's passion for fighting hunger runs deep. Both growing up in single-parent homes, Dave and Cheryl know firsthand how important it is to have access to nourishing, consistent food.

Cheryl, though retired, has made it her personal mission to feed school children in the Akron Public School district. On a Saturday morning, you can find Cheryl, her family and friends packing 200 weekend food bags for children they'll never meet. Sourcing the food, packing and delivering the bags — Cheryl does it all.

“Finding food for kids keeps us busy! We talk about food insecurity a lot — this is what we do. It's a part of our lives,” she said.



You can also find Cheryl at the Foodbank's Main Campus in Akron a few times per month. She is a dedicated volunteer who has helped in the warehouse, at drive-thru distributions, and is someone we

rely heavily on for administrative support. She also plans to be a regular, friendly face in the new food pantry.

The Venarge's have passed their philanthropic spirit to their children and six granddaughters. It's become an annual tradition for the girls, now ages 12 to 21, to convene at the Akron Community Foundation to help determine what organizations their grandparents grant money to each year. They receive grant proposals and hear presentations on each charity before deciding which charities to support. They have also visited some of the organizations to see their impact firsthand.

“We think it's very important for the children to be aware of their surroundings — to see firsthand what is going on in their community,” said Dave.

Our community is lucky to have such a generous and dedicated couple like Dave and Cheryl who are willing to support local causes both financially and with their time and talents. Thank you, Dave and Cheryl, for making a significant impact on hunger in our community!

A note from Foodbank president & CEO



As we reflect on 2023, I want to highlight a few things I believe will define the year in the history of the Foodbank. The headline is, without question, the record surge in the number of people seeking emergency food assistance. The reduction of pandemic-era benefits combined with the surge in costs caused by inflation was an overwhelming mix for many people in our community. We have seen a nearly 30% increase in the number of people visiting food programs in our network, when comparing this year to last. **In partnership with our network, we served more people in 2023 than any year of the pandemic — more than any period in our 41-year history.**

This sharp increase in demand, although clearly driven by factors established during the pandemic, took place in the context of an inching recovery in other areas. The supply chain, so disrupted in the past few years, started to resemble some of its pre-pandemic reliability. This led to an increase in food donations and during the last two quarters of 2023, we saw food donations begin to stabilize. **But the 15% increase in food donations we managed to gather was not enough to cover the monumental 30% increase in demand.** All of this took place in a dramatically higher cost environment. There's definitely work to do, and we're in a great place to do it.

Those of you who regularly visit our facilities have seen the new Stark County Campus, opened

in 2021, and have observed the expansion and remodeling of the Main Campus in Akron. The completion of the two construction projects culminated with a ribbon cutting in Akron this month, thus concluding eight years of capital planning, fundraising and building projects. Our entire infrastructure has been rebuilt. We have tenured staff who know the work, our volunteer workforce is returning to its former strength and our board leadership is second to none.

A day never passes that we aren't grateful for the generosity of our supporters and hunger-relief partners who make this work happen.

There would simply not be a strong food bank acting as a safety net for families struggling in this community were it not for you. That is the bottom line. We work for you. We work to deliver on our shared vision of a thriving community free of hunger. We have been the difference between hunger, homelessness and utility shut-off notices for thousands of our neighbors in 2023. With your faithful support, we can meet the challenges of inflation and whatever comes next, and continue to be a cornerstone of hope and stability in this community for generations to come.

If no one has told you they love you today, let me close by telling you that the Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank loves you. We really do.

Daniel R. Flowers

Daniel R. Flowers, *President & CEO*



20th Annual Polar Bear Jump FEBRUARY 24, 2024

Wanted: Warm-hearted people willing to freeze their bodies to raise money to feed people and fight hunger! Gather a group of friends for the 20th annual Portage Lakes Polar Bear Jump on February 24, 2024.

Register at portagelakespolarbearclub.com.





Bob and Phyllis dedicate their time to feeding their neighbors in Medina County.

As co-directors of Brunswick Food Pantry, they serve approximately 1,500 families annually, including retired adults living on fixed incomes in nearby senior living communities.

Local couple turns hardship into caring for their community

Hunger-relief partners in the Foodbank's network are dedicated to the local fight against hunger; operating a food program requires a compassionate heart. The support and love they extend to our neighbors embody the true spirit of service, offering hope and nourishment to families in need. Some run a food pantry out of pure kindness, while others do so from a place of empathy, having known the struggle of hunger firsthand.

Bob and Phyllis are a married couple who both experienced hunger while growing up. Phyllis' father was a coal miner and faced frequent layoffs, while Bob's family encountered food insecurity after his father passed away and his mother was pregnant with her fourth child. Both remember receiving free canned food, powdered milk and rice to make it by.

"We both grew up not having much," recounts Bob.

Now in their 70s, Bob and Phyllis dedicate their time to feeding their neighbors in Medina County. As co-directors of Brunswick Food Pantry, they serve approximately 1,500

families annually, including retired adults living on fixed incomes in nearby senior living communities.

“

This pantry is a lifesaver for a lot of people – it's very important.”

Richard
Food Recipient



The food pantry takes into account dietary needs and cultural preferences. They strive to provide low-sugar, gluten-free options and culturally preferred foods to the people they serve.

“We have two clients that, for religious purposes, do not eat any meat. So, when they come in, we just ask them, ‘What would you prefer today?’” Phyllis says. “We'll give them extra canned vegetables and other groceries.”

The food pantry supports families beyond food, providing essential items like diapers for children and adults, personal hygiene products and other necessities. Most of these items are not covered by SNAP benefits.

Bob and Phyllis have been helping with the pantry for 23 years. Over the past few decades, the pair has helped build strong relationships with the community. The food pantry thrives with support from their city, local organizations, businesses, other emergency food programs and their partnership with the Foodbank.

The Foodbank is so thankful for Brunswick Food Pantry's hard work and commitment to local hunger relief. Together, we can help feed our neighbors in need to help ensure no one goes hungry.



Give monthly to help families all year long

One in 8 individuals and 1 in 6 children in our community may struggle with hunger. The Foodbank depends on reliable, steady support to help our neighbors in need every day of the year. Support hunger relief all year long by joining the Sustainer Circle. This monthly giving program allows Foodbank friends and dedicated community members to easily help feed kids, seniors and families in our community.

To join the Sustainer Circle, please contact Laura Villwock at 330.535.6900 or visit akroncantonfoodbank.org/monthly-giving.

MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

- Exclusive Sustainer Circle events and activities
- Sneak peek at upcoming Foodbank programming
- Special volunteer opportunities
- Reduced mail from the Foodbank
- Support the Foodbank all year long with consistent and smaller payments
- Recurring auto-payments make giving easy

Mark Your Calendar

FEBRUARY 24, 2024

Portage Lakes Polar Bear Jump

MARCH 1, 2024

Harvest for Hunger Campaign Kick-off Luncheon

MARCH 1-MAY 31, 2024

Harvest for Hunger: Check Out Hunger



Harvest for Hunger Campaign kicks off in March

Say no to local hunger and yes to feeding families. Support the Foodbank's 33rd annual Harvest for Hunger Campaign. Harvest for Hunger is your Foodbank's largest and most essential annual fundraising campaign, helping support food distribution all year long. This year's goal is to raise the equivalent of 4.2 million meals, and we need your help!

For more information, visit akroncantonfoodbank.org/harvest

✓ CHECK OUT HUNGER

Donate \$10, \$5 or \$1 each time you visit a participating supermarket or GetGo gas station.

✓ HOST A VIRTUAL FOOD DRIVE

Create a personalized online fundraiser and share with your social networks.

✓ HOST A FOOD & FUNDS DRIVE

Collect food and funds for your Foodbank.

✓ FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Please consider making a personal donation or a corporate gift.

Honor Roll

THANK YOU TO OUR TOP SUPPORTERS OF THE SEASON

Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank Staff
Amazon FC AKR1
Aultman Health Foundation
Ronald & Grace Barber
Barberton Community Foundation
Bauhart Family
Ken & Gerri Blum
Buckeye Corrugated, Inc.
Eileen Burg
Phillip & Debra Canuto
The Chiron Family Chairtable Fund
The Christ Foundation
Community Health Resources, Inc.
Costco Wholesale
CVS Health
Dominion Energy
Enterprise Holdings Foundation
FirstEnergy
The Harry K. and Emma R. Fox Charitable Foundation
GAR Foundation
Giant Eagle
GOJO Industries, Inc.
Diane L. Graham
Bruce & Erica Greer Family Foundation
Greg & Tricia Griffith
Heinen's Fine Foods
John Hinds
Hudson St. Mary Men's Club
Louis Jaber
Jeffrey & Elizabeth Kahrs
Dale Gilbert & Mildred Keyser
Kovatch Castings, Inc.
James & Grace Kozak
Nathan Lieb
Andy & Emily Little
Philip & Peggy Lloyd
Charles E. Loehr Charitable Trust
Massillon Cable TV
The Mitsui USA Foundation
NJM Insurance Group
Robert O. & Annamae Orr Family Foundation
Gary & Cheryl Prather
Louise Pursley
The Ada C. and Helen J. Rank Foundation
Timothy & Katherine Rasinski
Ripple Effect CLE Fund
Joe & Annette Ruby
The Samuel Reese Willis Foundation, Inc.
Larry Shirk
The Sisler McFawn Foundation
The J.M. Smucker Co.
Stark County Medical Society
David & Cheryl Venarge
Walmart & Walmart Foundation
Barry Weidner Memorial Golf Tournament Fund
Cheryl Wells
The Welty Family Foundation
Westfield
Woodforest National Bank

Thank you for supporting your Foodbank's Holiday Campaign!

More than 80 organizations coordinated food and funds drives with their schools, faith-based organizations and coworkers, and nearly 1,000 elves participated in the Foodbank's 11th annual Selfless Elf 5k. The holidays were brighter because of your support of the Foodbank and our neighbors in need. Thank you for creating a season filled with kindness, warmth and nourishing meals for local families!



Students from Richfield Elementary School donated 839 pounds of cereal to help our neighbors in need.

Selfless elves jingled their way through downtown Akron to support hunger relief.



Board of Directors

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