

INSIDE THIS ISSUE It takes a team effort to provide food for the hungry.**2** Employee of the Year.**3** FRUITFUL PARTNERSHIP: Produce vendors donate nutritious food for the hungry.**4** From festivals to food shows: AT&T Pioneers pitch in to help the hungry.**5** Passion for cooking drives Chicago's Community Kitchens graduate.**6** AGENCY PROFILE: St. Columbanus' volunteer team vital in bridging the food distribution gap.**7** Community comes together for One City, One Food Drive.**8**

foodforthought

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PHOTOS: VICTOR POWELL



Chicago's Community Kitchens staff includes, from left, Jenny Urban, Jesus Sanchez, Lisa Gershenson, LaKeesha Jackson, Francisco Magana Soto, Herbert Varner, Dorothy Sumpter, Kweli Cheek and Felimon Rangel. Rob Lundy is pictured at right.



Chicago's Community Kitchens Program, Food Depository volunteer earn national recognition

The Chicago's Community Kitchens Program and longtime volunteer Rob Lundy received national awards in October for their outstanding commitment to the fight against hunger in Cook County. America's Second Harvest, the nation's food bank network, presented Chicago's Community Kitchens with the Community Kitchen Program of the Year award and named Rob the Individual Volunteer of the Year. The awardees were chosen from 30 Community Kitchen Programs and 200 food banks nationwide.

"While we have long known that we have an excellent Community Kitchen program and fantastic volunteers, it is a great honor to be recognized by our peers," said Kate Maehr, executive director of the Greater Chicago Food Depository.

Chicago's Community Kitchens is the Food Depository's 12-week culinary training program for unemployed and underemployed adults. Students prepare approximately 2,000 meals every day for children in the Kids Cafe® Program while learning skills that will help them succeed in the food industry. The Chicago's Community Kitchens staff is made up of culinary instructors,

production chefs and a workforce development coordinator. Three staff members are alumni of the program.

"We're from such diverse backgrounds and have such different skill sets," executive chef Lisa Gershenson said. "But the thrill for all of us is to see the progress students make during their time here."

Rob Lundy was honored for his 14 years of service to the Food Depository, including the past eight years as a produce delivery driver. The retired Treasury Department employee delivers fresh fruits and vegetables to member food pantries, soup kitchens and shelters across Cook County. Last year, Rob spent 125 days delivering nearly 450,000 pounds of fresh produce for people in need. He also recently celebrated his 700th produce delivery route. Additionally, Rob has helped out at food drives, fundraisers and food rescues.

"The reason I deliver produce is that I feel like I am making a positive difference in people's lives every day," Rob explained. "At the Food Depository, every day makes a difference. There are a lot of jobs out there that you can't say that." ■

It takes a team effort to provide food for the hungry



By Kate Maehr
Executive Director

On a Friday afternoon not long ago, we received a call from our colleagues at the Food Bank of Northwest Indiana. Unable to accommodate a massive shipment of potatoes, our fellow food bankers in Gary contacted the Greater Chicago Food Depository. Two tractor-trailers soon arrived at the Food Depository. It was late in the day and many of our staff had gone home for the weekend, but a handful of employees spent the next several hours shoveling potatoes out of the trucks. By 10 p.m., all 85,000 pounds of potatoes had been unloaded. On the following Monday, the potatoes were being shipped to pantries, soup kitchens and shelters across Cook County.

The difference an individual can make is remarkable. One of the people featured on the cover of this newsletter, longtime volunteer Rob Lundy, delivers fresh fruits and vegetables to hundreds of people each week. The award-winning Chicago's Community Kitchens staff is made up of individuals from diverse backgrounds who work together to prepare students for jobs in the culinary field and to send meals to Kids Cafes.

Sometimes the scale of the hunger issue in our community can be daunting, but in the end food banks are about dedicated individuals who provide food for hungry people in our community. It was a group of inspired individuals who founded the Greater Chicago Food Depository on the basic principle of taking food that would otherwise go to waste and distributing it to people in need. That's what the two trailers of potatoes illustrate so well.

Through a few simple actions, you too can team up with us this holiday season. Now, more than ever, we need everyone to be engaged with us in this fight against hunger. Changes in the food industry and reduced shipments from the federal government have made acquiring food increasingly difficult. Our hope is that you will team up with us by donating food through our One City, One Food Drive initiative. Whether a can of soup—or a truckload of potatoes—every gift makes a difference for the nearly 90,000 people who turn to the Food Depository every week.



Employee of the Quarter

Many visitors to the Food Depository's warehouse on the Southwest Side comment on the cleanliness of the facility. Proper sanitation is a vital part of the Food Depository's distribution of more than 40 million pounds of food to the hungry every year.

Facilities maintenance engineer Ben Schroeder is the person behind the scenes who ensures that the warehouse and its grounds are expertly maintained. Ben and his team are responsible for the maintenance of everything from forklifts to flowers. Safety comes first for Ben, who arrives before dawn to walk the halls of the Food Depository to make sure fire egresses are clear and other precautions are in place.

"Ben keeps this facility operating flawlessly," said Kate Maehr, executive director of the Food Depository. "We're so proud of this beautiful and magnificently maintained facility." ■

Team of the Quarter

The Food Depository's Inventory Control Team consistently went beyond its job description during the past quarter. The team has the Herculean task of keeping track of all of the 40 million pounds of food that the Food Depository distributes to its member food pantries, soup kitchens and shelters. While providing excellent service to fellow Food Depository staff and member agencies, team members found time to assist with volunteer projects and lend a hand at special events. For all of their efforts, the Inventory Control Team—from left, Gloria Scott, Melissa Boysen, Amy Clancy, Prudence Williams and Cynthia Sandoval—was named Team of the Quarter. ■



Employee of the Year

The Volunteer Services Department welcomes thousands of volunteers to the Food Depository's Southwest Side facility every year. Many volunteers are introduced to the Food Depository by Volunteer Services Manager Colleen Campbell or one of the members of her team. Volunteers truly are a vital link in the food chain—more than 14,000 volunteers came through the Food Depository's doors during the past year.

The Volunteer Services team is responsible for coordinating projects throughout the Food Depository while managing groups of 100 volunteers or more. On an average day, Colleen works with nearly every department at the Food Depository—whether it be to check on how many volunteers are needed to clean cabbage heads, or to arrange schedules for volunteers who deliver

produce, or to fulfill volunteer needs for Food Depository special events across the county.

Colleen began her three-year stint at the Food Depository as the annual giving officer in the Fund Development Department. In the past year she not only learned her new job and managed a new staff, but she provided exemplary customer service to thousands of supporters. For her dedication, outstanding performance and perseverance, Colleen was named Employee of the Year.

"During the past year, Colleen accepted every challenge that came her way—and did it with a smile," said Kate Maehr, executive director of the Food Depository. "She's made such an impact on the thousands of people who come here and volunteer." ■



Poverty increase reflects Cook County hunger trend

The poverty rate in Cook County has steadily increased during the past several years, according to information released in September. The rising poverty rate coincides with a rise in the number of individuals and families who turn to the Greater Chicago Food Depository and its member agencies for food assistance.

"Hunger is a symptom of poverty," said Alicia Huguelet, director of public policy at the Food Depository. "The Cook County poverty data confirms what we have been seeing at member food pantries, soup kitchens and shelters. Many low-income individuals struggle to afford food after they have paid utility, rent and other bills each month."

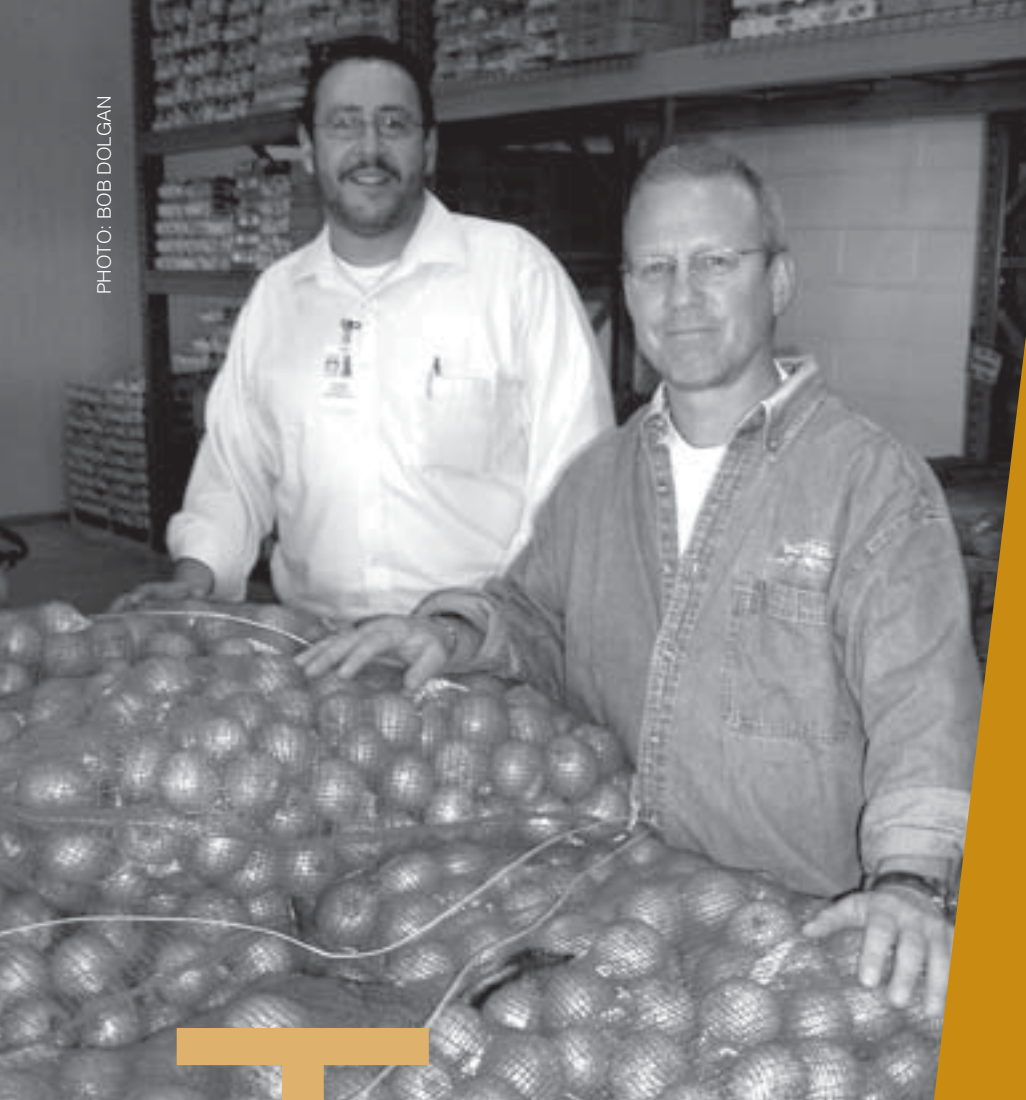
Data supplied by the Heartland Alliance and the U.S. Census Bureau indicates that the Cook County poverty rate in 2006 was 15.3 percent, up slightly from 15 percent in 2005 and far higher than the 2001 poverty rate of 13.7 percent. (A family of four earning less than \$20,000 is considered to be living below the poverty level.)

"People who turn to us for food assistance are above and below the poverty level," Alicia said. "For working families that are barely making it, losing a job or health insurance is an enormous setback that often results in a trip to the neighborhood pantry."

According to Food Depository data, 73 percent of member agencies reported an increase in the number of clients they served from 2001 to 2005. Nearly 500,000 hungry men, women and children turn to the Food Depository and its member agencies for food assistance each year. The total of Cook County residents living in poverty in 2006 was 796,848.

"This newly released data illustrates the scale of the issues facing the hungry people in our community," Alicia said. ■

PHOTO: BOB DOLGAN



FRUITFUL PARTNERSHIP: Produce vendors donate nutritious food for the hungry

Carlos Rodriguez, left, of the Food Depository and Breck Grigas of Worldwide Produce ensure that fruits and vegetables are donated to hunger-relief programs in Cook County.

Acts of generosity are commonplace at the Chicago International Produce Market. Sometimes it's the forklift operator who sets dozens of crates of green peppers aside for the Greater Chicago Food Depository. Or the manager who sees that there are extra cartons of squash in danger of spoiling and gives them to the Food Depository. These everyday actions have delivered millions of pounds of produce to hungry people in our community through the years.

"We are so fortunate to have our longtime relationship with our friends at the Chicago International Produce Market," said Tom Hayes, director of food resources at the Food Depository. "The vendors there contact us as soon as they know food may be in danger of going to waste. The result is more nutritious produce for the people we serve."

The partnership between the vendors at the Produce Market and the Food Depository dates to the late 1970s. Robert Strube Sr. of Strube Celery and

Vegetable Company was one of the founders of the Food Depository, which was first housed in office space at the historic South Water Street Market. Last year, produce made up 25 percent of the Food Depository's total distribution of 40 million pounds of food.

The Food Depository's relationship with the Produce Market has mutual benefits: to feed the hungry and relieve donors of excess inventory at the same time. The market is a consortium of companies that distributes fruits and vegetables to independent grocers, retailers and wholesalers throughout the Midwest. Shipments arrive from all over the Western Hemisphere. Sometimes growers and shippers send more food to the market than can be passed on to retail outlets.

"Everything is supply and demand driven," said Breck Grigas, president of Worldwide Produce and president of the market's association. "A lot of shippers will be long in one commodity. If there are too many bell peppers grown in Georgia there are too many—no matter for who the shipper is."

The Food Depository sends trucks to the Produce Market, a short drive north on I-55, several times each week. Carlos Rodriguez, who recently became Food

Depository business development manager, works with produce vendors to identify produce that would otherwise eventually require disposal. The produce is then distributed—often in less than one day—to hunger-relief programs around the county.

"Carlos is committed to managing the produce program so we can provide the best quality to our agencies," Tom said. "Wholesome, useable produce is critical to our ability to meet the needs of the community as a food bank."

Added Breck: "It's a win-win situation for everyone involved. It's good for the Produce Market because merchandise doesn't go to waste. We're more than happy to help out the Food Depository in any way we can." ■

If you have questions about donating produce to the Greater Chicago Food Depository, contact Carlos Rodriguez at 773-843-2847 or crodriguez@gcfd.org.

Teamwork is at the heart of what we do



PHOTO: LEAH RAY

Illinois' food banks come together to share ideas

Members of the Illinois Food Bank Association met at the Greater Chicago Food Depository in September to discuss how food banks can continue to collaborate in the statewide fight against hunger. Founded in 1998, the association is a coalition of eight food banks that annually provide food for more than 900,000 hungry men, women and children in Illinois through nearly 2,000 pantries, soup kitchens and shelters. The association includes the Central Illinois Foodbank, the Eastern Illinois Foodbank, the Greater Chicago Food Depository, the Northern Illinois Food Bank, the Peoria Area Food Bank, the River Bend Foodbank, the St. Louis Area Foodbank and the Tri-State Foodbank. ■

The Food Depository's Angel La Luz, left, and Eric Knepper helped unload two truckloads of potatoes.

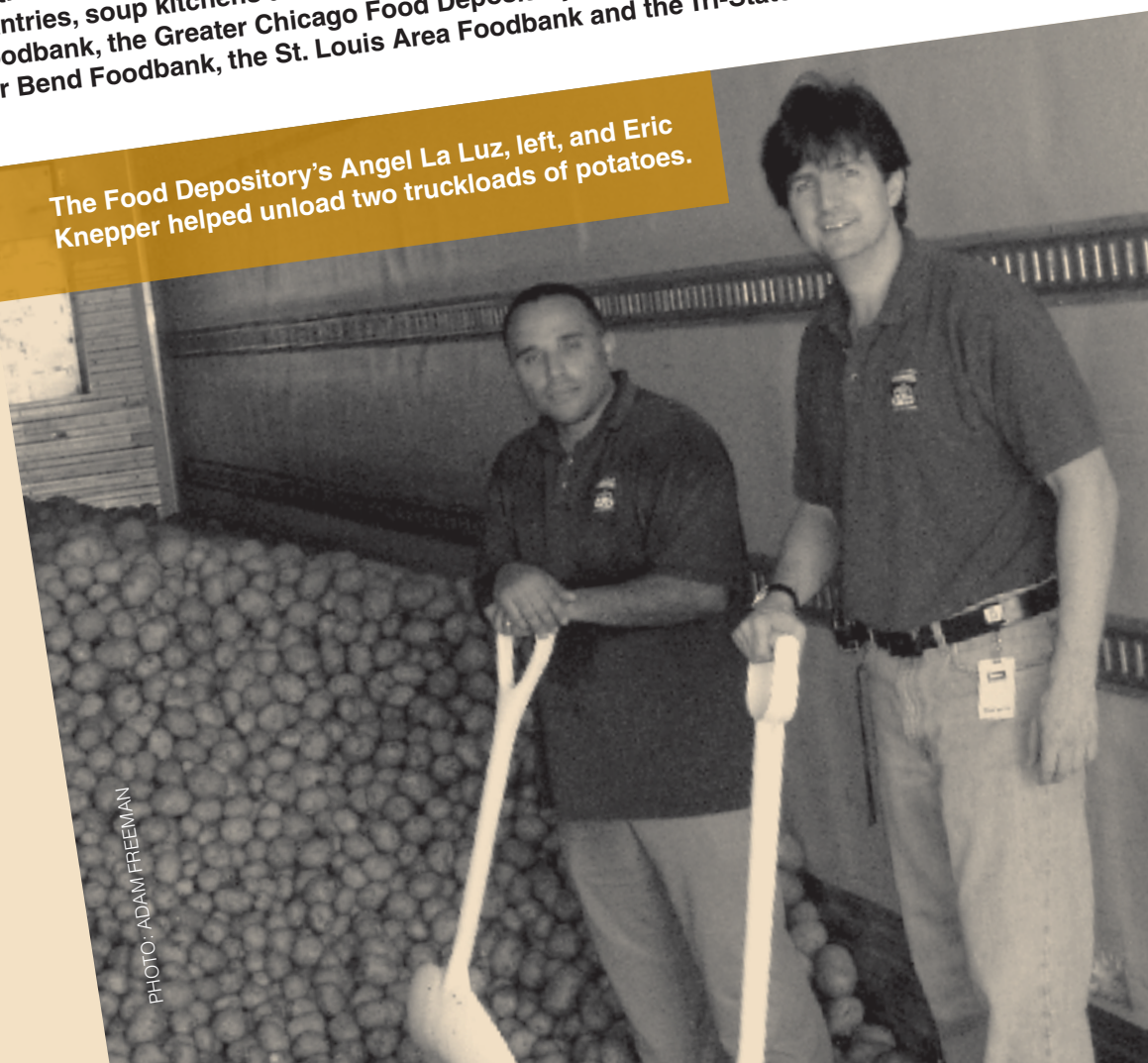


PHOTO: ADAM FREEMAN

Potato delivery feeds thousands

When two truckloads of potatoes arrived at the Food Depository on a recent Friday night, the few personnel left in the building sprang into action. Armed with snow shovels, a diligent group of seven Food Depository staff dug into the piles of loose potatoes and unloaded the trailers. The staffers shoveled 85,000 pounds of potatoes in all. Remarkably, the trucks were unloaded by 10 p.m. By Monday, the potatoes were distributed to hungry people in our community. ■

Volunteers from the Illinois chapter of AT&T Pioneers come to the Food Depository for Saturday morning repack sessions each month.



PHOTO: BOB DOLGAN

From festivals to food shows: AT&T Pioneers pitch in to help the hungry

The Illinois chapter of AT&T Pioneers is a group of active and retired employees who dedicate their time to enhance the communities where they live. Their involvement with the Greater Chicago Food Depository stretches back to 1985, and the group is a past winner of the Food Depository's Distinguished Volunteer Service Award in the group category.

Last year, 341 Pioneer volunteers dedicated 1,500 hours during monthly Saturday morning repack sessions, food shows, the Hunger Walk, food rescues, and at Kids Cafes. They form part of the largest company-sponsored group of volunteers in the country. AT&T encourages its volunteers by allowing them to pitch in on community efforts on company time—at organizations that have been vetted by the company.

Before working with the Food Depository, many volunteers were unaware of the growing needs among the hungry in Cook County. "To know that so many people don't have something to eat in your own backyard is just heart-wrenching," said Rebecca Ruiz, project coordinator of AT&T's executive support team. A Humboldt Park resident, Rebecca has volunteered with the Food Depository for five years, participating in food rescues, the Festival of Lights, the Hunger Walk, and the Taste of Chicago.

The Food Depository has become an attractive human services organization for AT&T volunteers because "the people at the Food

Depository are helpful and always very appreciative of your being there," said Charlene Herda, team leader in business communication services at AT&T. "That makes it very rewarding." Charlene is a Bucktown resident who has been volunteering at the Food Depository for six years, sorting and packing food on-site and participating in food rescues at food industry trade shows.

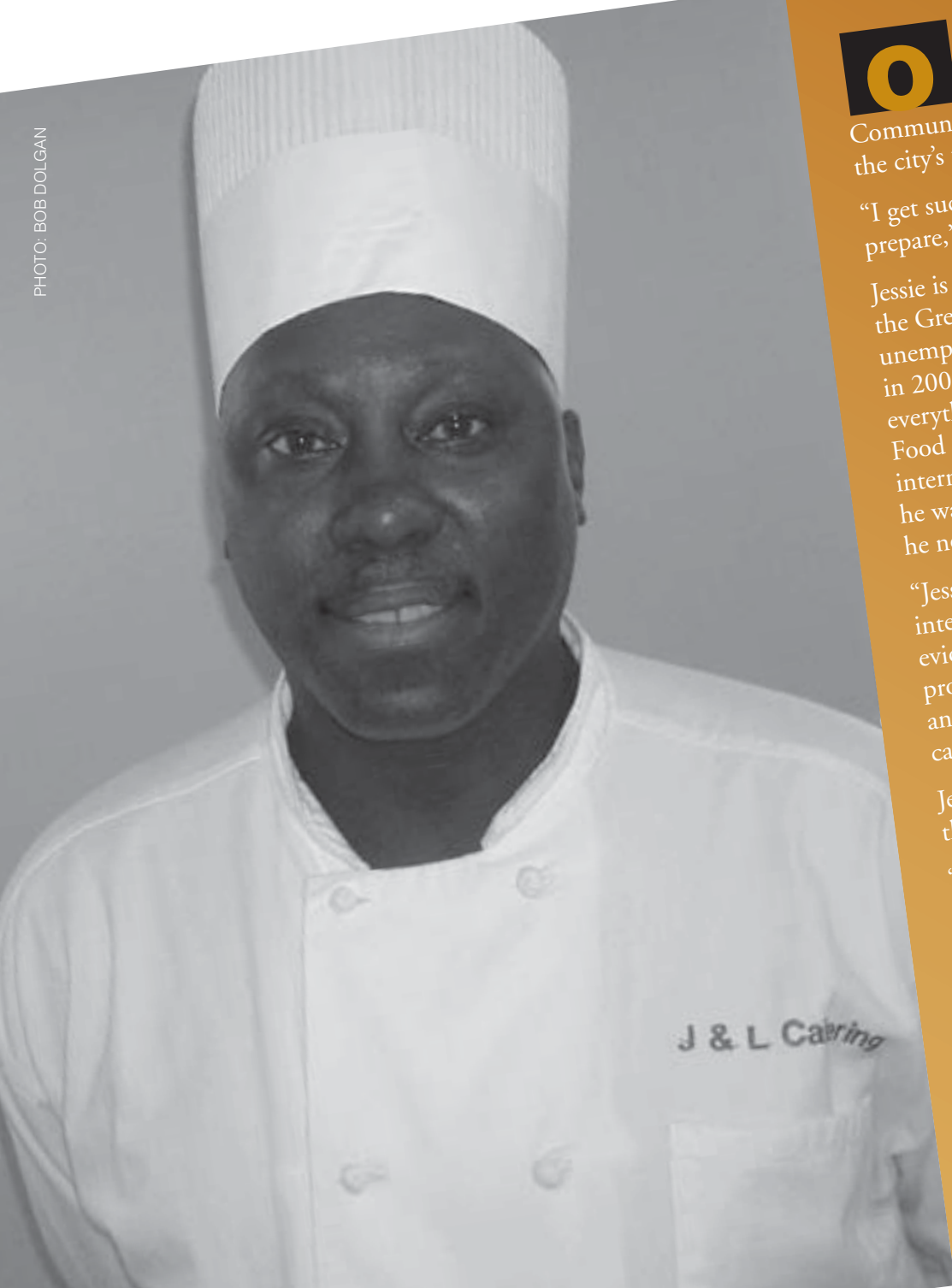
Besides benefiting the community, volunteering helps build better relationships in the workplace and encourages teamwork. "Not only are you able to support the Food Depository through the volunteer events, you get a sense of camaraderie with your co-workers," said Sylvia Aldrete, an executive assistant at AT&T. "You meet co-workers that you would never otherwise meet. It brings us all together, which is unique." A volunteer since 1998, Sylvia has participated in AT&T Monthly Repacks, the Hunger Walk, food rescues, and the Bag Hunger event.

For volunteers like Charlene, it is the combination of being "appreciated and welcomed" that is so rewarding. "You know there's a lot to be done. It just leaves you with a good feeling once you've done the work." ■

To volunteer at the Food Depository, call 773-247-FOOD or e-mail volunteerservices@gcfd.org.

Passion for cooking drives Chicago's Community Kitchens graduate

PHOTO: BOB DOLGAN



On September 21, Jessie Harper stood before a crowd of 100 people in a neatly pressed chef's jacket and a traditional chef's hat. A year earlier, he had just begun a culinary journey at the Chicago's Community Kitchens Program. Now, he could call himself a chef with one of the city's top caterers.

"I get such a joy out of making meals and seeing people enjoy the food I prepare," Jessie said. "Words just escape me."

Jessie is the latest transformation story from Chicago's Community Kitchens, the Greater Chicago Food Depository's free culinary training program for unemployed or underemployed adults. When Jessie joined the program late in 2006, his only food industry experience was waiting tables. He learned everything from knife skills to cooking temperatures during his 12 weeks at the Food Depository. At the end of the term each culinary student is assigned an internship as part of their training. Jessie was assigned to J&L Catering, where he was soon hired as a prep chef. In addition to his day-to-day cooking duties, he now is a chef at off-site events.

"Jessie has been a great fit at J&L as have other Chicago's Community Kitchens interns," said Kevin Kelly, executive chef and owner of J&L Catering. "It was evident that he took advantage of everything that was taught through the program because he often refers to specific production tasks he participated in and quotes from the chefs. He definitely had a very solid skill base when he came to J&L so he was prepared to work in a professional kitchen."

Jessie returned to the Food Depository in September as the alumni speaker for the latest graduating class of Chicago's Community Kitchens.

"I stand here today before you as a success," Jessie said at the graduation ceremony. "The Chicago's Community Kitchens program and the chefs and the staff have had a lot to do with my success."

Since its founding in 1998, nearly 500 individuals have graduated from Chicago's Community Kitchens. Students learn culinary and life skills while preparing up to 10,000 meals every week for children in the Food Depository's Kids Cafe® Program. The job placement rate for students is 86 percent. Many, like Jessie, are hired by their internship sites.

"Jessie has a passion for cooking," said Kevin. "He comes to J&L with more than experience from the program. He wants to cook and learn more things about food and the industry." ■

AGENCY PROFILE: St. Columbanus' volunteer team vital in bridging the food distribution gap



PHOTO: STEPHANIE MOLINA

What had been a small chapel, a classroom, and garage at St. Columbanus Church has been turned into an important service center for the community—a place where thousands of hungry people a year, and growing, can receive food. The St. Columbanus/St. Gelasius Food Pantry opened three years ago as a Greater Chicago Food Depository agency partner distributing canned goods to 50 families a month in the Greater Grand Crossing area on Chicago's South Side. Now, 250 families per week are receiving canned and fresh food, baby necessities, toiletries and clothes.

"I grew up around here," said LaVerne Morris, a volunteer and co-director of the pantry. "To come back and realize that there is this kind of need... We have hungry people living next door, how can that be?"

St. Columbanus recently received the Outstanding Agency Award from the Food Depository, which along with several local Catholic parishes provides the pantry with nonperishable food and more than 4,000 pounds of produce to feed the poor and working poor of the community each week. The flurry of activity each Wednesday for an hour at 10 a.m. is the result of several days' hard work and careful planning. The pantry relies on some 30 volunteers, mostly church members, who devote as much as 24 hours a week,

accepting deliveries and unloading, sorting and repackaging them.

Volunteers like LaVerne are essential to the pantry. Most come from the parish, but others were once standing in the pantry lines receiving food. "We have become like a well-oiled machine. The camaraderie is amazing."

The pantry lies within one of the communities recently identified as one of the top 10 priority areas for emergency food needs by the Food Depository's Unmet Need Study. In Greater Grand Crossing, the need for food assistance among residents exceeds the current level of Food Depository distribution. As a result, the Food Depository has begun to further invest in the community. A grant provided St. Columbanus with two new large capacity refrigerators and a conveyer belt, which helps move along 300 cases of dry food per week. In addition, one of the Food

Depository's two Producemobiles delivers fresh produce every third Tuesday of the month. "Poverty is alive and well in our neighborhood," says Rev. Matthew Eyerman, St. Columbanus pastor.

LaVerne is growing more concerned with the pressures on the working poor, few of whom are able to attend the weekly morning distribution. Her goal: open the pantry one evening a week for the working poor.

What drives volunteers like LaVerne? "We know that those we are serving need the food, and they appreciate it. They are grateful." And she also knows that this is only a first step in addressing the underlying causes of hunger. "By no stretch of the imagination are we solving the hunger problem. This is a Band-Aid. But it is so important." ■

Focus on fitness and fun

More than 180 children attended the Kids Cafe® Summer Event at McKinley Park in August. The event brought children together for a day of health education and fitness. Activities included parachute games, relay races, an obstacle course, basketball and more. The 5-4-3-2-1 Go!™ Team of the Consortium to Lower Obesity in Chicago Children was on hand leading sessions about healthy eating and physical activity.

The Food Depository distributes food to more than 40 Kids Cafes in Cook County. Kids Cafes are after-school programs that provide tutoring, educational programs and hot meals in a nurturing environment. The Kids Cafe program is a national program of America's Second Harvest, the nation's food bank network, administered locally by the Food Depository. ■



PHOTO: MARIA MILLHAM

At this time of year, no one should go hungry. Look for the Food Depository's holiday mailing in coming weeks. Please give what you can.



Send a holiday greeting with the Food Depository

For the first time, the Greater Chicago Food Depository is making its entire stock of holiday greeting cards available to the general public. The cards, which include designs from 1993 to 2006, feature beautiful watercolors donated by local artist Martha Jannotta. You can help the hungry by purchasing holiday cards and sharing your support of the Food Depository and its hunger-relief efforts with friends and family. Also new for this year are holiday e-cards. E-cards are a fast and fun way to send an e-mail greeting featuring one of Martha's designs.

|| VISIT WWW.CHICAGOSFOODBANK.ORG || to purchase holiday cards or to send a holiday e-card.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

NOVEMBER

All month

One City, One Food Drive.
Cook County.

Cookies for Kids.
Ruby Tuesday locations.

Click for Cans (through
Dec. 18), www.chunky.com

Rent-A-Chef, Inc.,
www.rent-a-chef.com

E&J Gallo and Jewel-
Osco Holiday Promotion
(through December).
Jewel-Osco locations.

Steak 'n Shake
Takhoma Gift Card Sale
(through December).
Steak 'n Shake locations.

1-7

Help Buck Hunger.
Jewel-Osco locations.

5-20

New Trier High School
Food Drive. Winnetka
and Northfield campuses.

12

Dominick's and ABC 7
Holiday Food Drive
(through Jan. 5).
Dominick's Finer
Foods locations.

14-17

Noodles & Company
Food Drive. Noodles &
Company locations.

15

Exchanges Holiday
Fund Drive. CBOE,
CME Group, CHX.

17

Eli's Cheesecake food
and fund drive. Chicago
Holiday Lights Festival.
Pioneer Court, 401 North
Michigan Avenue.

20

Sharing It Day.
Merchandise Mart.

22

Thanksgiving Holiday
(through Nov. 23).
Food Depository closed.

Thanksgiving To-Go.
Lawry's The Prime Rib,
100 East Ontario Street.

30th Running of the
Turkey Trot. Lincoln Park.

DECEMBER

All month

One City, One Food Drive.
Cook County.

Dominick's and ABC
7 Holiday Food Drive
(through Jan. 5).
Dominick's Finer
Foods locations.

1

Boy Scouts of America
'Scouting for Food'
(through Dec. 8).
Cook County.

Whole Foods Market Food
Drive (through Dec. 22).
Lakeview, Lincoln Park,
North Halsted, Gold Coast
and South Loop locations.

4

Tracy Butler, live from
Dominick's and ABC
7 Holiday Food Drive.
Dominick's locations.

4-5

LaSalle Bank Holiday
Bazaar. 135 South
LaSalle Street.

11

Chicago Public Schools /
Chicago Teachers
Union Food Drive
(through Dec. 22).
Chicago Public Schools.

21

Chicago's Community
Kitchens Class #40
Graduation.
Food Depository.

24- 25

Christmas Holiday.
Food Depository closed.

COMMUNITY COMES TOGETHER FOR ONE CITY, ONE FOOD DRIVE

Supporters across Cook County are gearing up for the holidays by organizing collections of food for One City, One Food Drive, a new effort that brings together food drives across the area. Canned food donations are needed now more than ever before because of reduced retail donations and a decline in food from the federal government. You can get involved by donating nonperishable food at area Dominick's Finer Foods locations through the Dominick's and ABC 7 Holiday Food Drive. Be on the lookout for collections by the Boy Scouts and at businesses, schools and other organizations.

We need items high in protein—canned meats, beef stew, chili and peanut butter. Also needed are canned vegetables and fruits, rice, pasta and cereal. With your help, we can restock our shelves with food for hungry people. Every person can make a difference this holiday season. ■

|| VISIT WWW.EVERY1CAN.ORG || for a complete list of One City, One Food Drive donation locations.



For event updates, visit www.chicagosfoodbank.org.

Tips for your *One City, One Food Drive* shopping list

The Food Depository's member food pantries, soup kitchens and shelters are in need of nonperishable food items that are high in protein and essential vitamins and minerals. The following are a few nutritious items that will help member agencies keep a balance of food on their shelves while serving the hungry people in our community.

- One serving of vegetable beef soup provides 125 percent of the daily requirement of Vitamin A and 10 grams of protein.
- One serving of chunk light tuna provides 13 grams of protein.
- One serving of whole grain cereal provides 51 percent of the daily requirement of dietary fiber.
- A serving of canned beans provides 32 percent of the daily requirement of dietary fiber.

One bag of groceries will make a difference in someone's life. || VISIT WWW.EVERY1CAN.ORG || for a complete list of our most-needed food drive items.



Providing food for hungry people while striving to end hunger in our community
A charter member of America's Second Harvest – The Nation's Food Bank Network

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