

harvest

A NEWSLETTER OF THE BLUE RIDGE AREA FOOD BANK



Generations of Love, Food, and Family

PAGE 2

Generosity for a Lifetime and Beyond

PAGE 4

Nourishing Communities: The Healthy Pantry Initiative

PAGE 6



Blue Ridge Area
FOOD BANK

Everyone should have enough to eat.

PARTNER
FOOD BANK OF
FEEDING AMERICA



Generations of Love, Food, and Family

“Food and family. Family means everything,” shared Belinda, who is raising three grandsons. “And food? Well, it brings you closer.”

Holding her family close is something that Belinda learned from her own grandmother, who raised Belinda and her siblings.

“Grandma B was the world for us. She was our glue,” Belinda said, proud of the woman who also delivered almost 400 local babies. “She loved everyone in Waynesboro. She took care of our family. She taught us how to love each other

and to take care of anyone—it didn’t matter who they were.”

Years later, Belinda is the glue for her grandsons—Tyleeq (13), Draelyn (9), and A.J. (6).

Belinda is the boys’ primary caregiver—a common situation in the United States of grandparents raising grandkids. Food insecurity is also becoming increasingly common: According to USDA data, 33 percent of all households led by a single female in 2022 were food insecure, nearly a 9 percent increase over 2021.

“My grandmother does so much for us,” Tyleeq said. “She brings out the best in us, so I do anything I can do for her. I take the trash out, make sure she’s good; basically I try to do anything I can do.”

Fueling growing bodies

Feeding three growing, active boys can be a lot. And without a job, temporarily, Belinda’s budget is tight. So, the grandkids visit the Boys & Girls Club in Waynesboro, where they eat healthy food after school.

“Eating at the Boys & Girls Club is great,” Tyleeq tells us. “It means when I get home, I’m not hungry. And when I’m not hungry, I can go outside and play and have fun.”

Programs like the Boys & Girls Club, which receives food from

For a fuller story of the family (with video) and how our community is helping so many more go to [brafb.org/blog](https://www.brafb.org/blog). (We’re grateful to the family for sharing their story and their time, and to Feeding America for capturing and producing this footage.)



SCAN HERE

the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank, help ensure kids have enough to eat year-round—whether it’s summer meals or after-school snacks.

Genie Foster, the chef at the Boys & Girls Club, specializes in finding creative culinary ways to encourage kids to eat healthy food. “Chef Genie,” as the kids call her, has spent her career trying to figure out little tricks that help ensure kids are eating healthy food. And she’s seen the difference it can make.



“When kids are full, their energy is higher, the way they react to you, the way they play, it’s different when they have food in their stomach. But when kids are hungry, you’ll see them in the corner, not wanting to play,” she said.

Staying healthy is a priority for Tyleeq—not only because he knows it helps with school, but also because he’s on his school’s football team.

“I’m number 80,” Tyleeq said proudly. “Playing football makes me happy. I love making a tackle and seeing people happy, seeing them smile and laugh.”



A.J. and Adrienne Young, co-founders of River City Bread Basket.

Waynesboro is a focus area for the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank. The food insecurity rate of 13 percent is among the highest in the Food Bank’s service area, especially among Black and Latino populations, according to a recent study.

Food Bank partners distribute 206,795 pounds of food annually in the City of Waynesboro. And we are dedicated to helping them do more. Over the summer, a new partner opened its doors, **River City Bread Basket**, a guest-choice food pantry in an area of the city considered a food desert.

By focusing strategically on target areas, the Food Bank will accelerate measures to end disparities in access to nutritious food, improve the health of guests, and support household financial stability.

Generosity for a Lifetime and Beyond

The Westfall's Will to End Hunger

Many donors give today to fund the work of the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank, and some special people also fund this work tomorrow, by including a gift in their will or trust.

Hugh and Connie Westfall are an example of both.

During their careers, Hugh worked in banking and at Augusta Co-Op and Connie taught elementary school in Rockingham and Augusta counties. Sometimes, Connie saw students coming to school hungry. Revealing the link between having enough nutritious food and thriving in childhood, Connie remarked, "Hunger and learning do not go hand in hand." She noted the educational, behavioral, and health challenges that can result when children don't have enough to eat.

After volunteering with local Kiwanis Club members at the Food Bank and its partners like the Valley Mission, Trinity Episcopal Church, and the Boys & Girls Club, they began financially supporting the Food Bank. Proving itself as a trustworthy, local organization, the Food Bank is part of their estate plans.



Why? Hugh's grandfather taught him, "You need to pull your weight, plus a little more."

"We want to see people taken care of when we're gone," said Hugh.

Along with other members of *The Will to End Hunger Society*, they will help provide food, hope, and dignity for future generations of Virginians.

"Make the moral commitment first," Hugh suggested, "then seek the help of professionals who can maximize your gift."

Tailored to your financial needs, planned gifts can help you make a meaningful contribution to end hunger in your community.

We are grateful to the Westfalls and many others who are helping create a future where everyone has enough to eat.

With a gift through your will or estate you can help ensure that the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank will be here for years to come, so that future generations grow up healthy—not hungry.

Learn more by visiting www.brafb.org/give/planned-giving/ or connecting with Karen Ratzlaff at (540) 213-8404 or kratzlaff@brafb.org. All inquiries are treated confidentially.



LEARN MORE



Expansion to Meet the Growing Need

Last year, 8.8 million pounds of food, or the equivalent of 200 tractor-trailers full of food, were moved through the warehouse located at our headquarters in Verona. That's one-third of the total 27 million pounds of food we distributed.

We were busting at the seams.

During the pandemic, we learned that we need more space—space to store even more food onsite, space to accept a larger variety of food with an emphasis on fresh and frozen items as we seek to improve the nutritional profile of the food we distribute, and flexible space to accommodate shifting workforce needs, both volunteer and paid. We also know the Food Bank's partner network and programs will continue to evolve.

Therefore, renovation of our largest facility was necessary and is now complete.

The renovation project was funded thanks to a private-public partnership comprised of generous donors who designated gifts to this purpose, an infrastructure grant from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) awarded by the Commonwealth, and some Food Bank savings.

As a result, we increased our storage capacity by 14 tractor-trailer loads, which means we can store half a million more pounds of both shelf-stable and frozen foods onsite. Because that food is distributed and replenished every few weeks, the increased amount of food deployed into our community over time is huge.

We're grateful for continued community support to power our work, which means we can serve our guests even better through our partners and programs, one truckload at a time.

We thank these generous donors for their gifts to this capital project:

Anne & Gene Worrell Foundation

Anonymous

Better Living Foundation

Boyd Thompson Revocable Trust

Community Foundation of the Central Blue Ridge

Hunter Smith Family Foundation

Irvin and Rosemary Marshall

Kroger, Mid-Atlantic Division

Neall Family Charitable Foundation

NTELOS-LUMOS High Impact Grant from the Community Foundation of the Central Blue Ridge

Smyth Community Fund at the Charlottesville Area Community Foundation

The Cabell Foundation

Interested in a tour? Email Karen Ratzlaff at kratzlaff@brafb.org to arrange a time.



Nourishing Communities: The Healthy Pantry Initiative

Everyone needs healthy food to thrive. Research clearly shows that limited access to nutritious food can lead to health issues, including obesity, diabetes, and heart disease.

Children experiencing hunger are more likely to be hospitalized, and they face higher risks of health conditions like anemia and asthma. Kids who miss meals are more likely to have problems in school and other social situations as they grow. And it's not just children who are at risk. Half of the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank's guests—all ages—report that someone at home has special dietary requirements because of their health.

Promoting nourishing food and good health for everyone, every day

To improve the health of our guests (a strategic goal), we intend to help partner food pantries provide wholesome, nutrient-rich options and improve the lives of guests through the Healthy Pantry Initiative.

The majority of Food Bank guests receive food assistance from our partners, which includes

food pantries, soup kitchens, and shelters.

The Healthy Pantry Initiative (HPI) invests in education and resources at the pantry level because that will have the biggest impact on the health and nutrition of our guests.

What is the Healthy Pantry Initiative?

The Blue Ridge Area Food Bank, with the Federation of Virginia Food Banks and all sister food banks in Virginia, wants to reshape Virginia's pantry network into a health-focused, neighbor-centered system.

Through the HPI, partner pantries are empowered to **implement 20 healthy practices that are guest-centered**, like:

- Expanding fresh and culturally familiar food options
- Connecting people with helpful community resources
- Providing opportunities for health education
- Removing barriers that keep our neighbors who are living with hunger from seeking help

Partners who join the HPI will commit to adding or expanding at least one healthy practice this year.



< Healthy pantries use signs like these to indicate the nutritional value of foods. Guests select from “Choose Often,” “Choose Sometimes,” and “Choose Rarely” categories, enabling them to decide on what food is right for them.



Community engagement: A vital component

Community engagement is pivotal to the success of the Healthy Pantry Initiative, fostering a sense of ownership and empowerment among guests, volunteers, and organizations involved.

The four categories of healthy food practices:

- 1 Food availability:** Providing foods through the pantry network that meet the unique dietary needs of neighbors facing hunger.
- 2 Community connection:** Partners collaborate to connect neighbors with more resources and support to help them thrive.
- 3 Health education:** Empowering neighbors with tools to make healthy choices.
- 4 Neighbor-centered:** Removing barriers so guests can access the foods needed to thrive.

Future outlook: Expanding impact

Through the Healthy Pantry Initiative, we aim to broaden our impact by reaching more communities, strengthening collaborations, and advocating for policies addressing the root causes of food insecurity. It’s sowing the seeds for a healthier, more resilient Virginia—one where every community member has enough to eat and access to the nourishment they need to thrive.



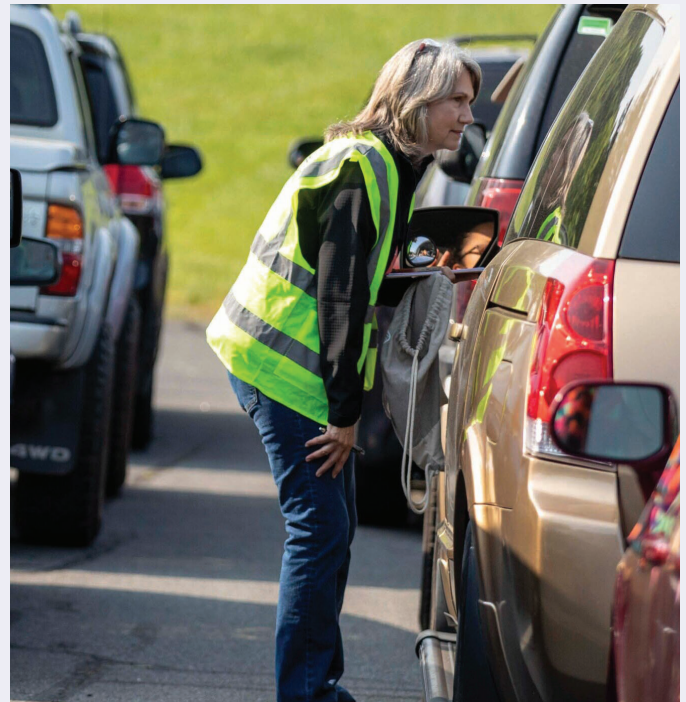
*Support our work
nourishing communities
so they can thrive.*

SCAN HERE

*Find out more about the
Food Bank’s guest surveys.*



SCAN HERE



How Our Guests Will Help Us Improve Our Work

Six food pantry partners across the region have signed up to take part in a pilot project to survey their guests. The survey asks guests about their household food needs, their experience at the food pantry, and how the pantry might improve, among other things.

At the same time, the Food Bank is evaluating its services by asking guests to give feedback in response to similar questions. Food Bank staff will survey guests at program sites.

These efforts align with our recently adopted strategic plan, which places our guests at the center of everything we do.



With gifts of time, food, funds, and voices, generous Food Bank donors help ensure everyone has access to nourishing food and good health. Solving hunger is a community-wide effort. The truth is, we are better when we stand together.

Across our 25-county service area, thousands of financial donors, volunteers, advocates, and friends actively support the work of the Food Bank and make each community stronger.

Here we highlight just a few examples of the many ways you stepped up in recent months. Thank you all!



Two grueling and impressive charity bike events each represent the power of one person with a great idea, and a call for help that results in a big impact. These champions bring together organizers, individuals, riders, and family and friends who support each participant. Collectively, over the past 12 years the annual **Green Bean Bike Challenge** and **Journey of Awesomeness** have raised enough to provide more than **2,300,000 meals**.



“Not only do we want to reach our neighbors experiencing food insecurity, we also want to do so with dignity,” said a 2023 Partner Impact & Innovation Grant recipient. Our friends at **The GIANT Company** are committed to setting a place at the table for everyone. This year, they **donated \$175,000** to support these grants and other Food Bank programs.

A Lifetime of Impact

Charles Lawrence Keith (born Kauffman) was a self-made man whose humble beginnings fostered a lifelong passion for peace, justice, and human rights. Essentially left an orphan, young Charlie looked out for his siblings until he joined the Merchant Marines and traveled the world, an adventure that provided him with an unconventional education.

Once back in New York City, Charlie worked as a house painter until he saved enough to buy rental properties. Over the years he became wealthy in many ways and was a devoted social justice advocate and philanthropist who created a charitable Foundation with his estate. He fought to expand horizons and improve life for people and the larger community, and the Foundation continued his good work for 50 years after his death, keeping his legacy alive.

The Blue Ridge Area Food Bank is grateful to be one of many fortunate beneficiaries. A generous sunset gift from the Foundation has established the **Charles L. Keith & Clara Miller Endowed Fund**, which will generate revenue in perpetuity to fund innovative, impactful grants to our partners and to purchase food for distribution.

THANK YOU, Generous Corporate, Foundation, and Event Partners



*REFLECTS SIGNIFICANT GIFTS RECEIVED JUNE 1 TO NOVEMBER 30, 2023

Welcome to our new Board Members

Ron Buchanan

Board of Directors

Ron is Chief Financial Officer for Habitat for Humanity of Greater Charlottesville



"I am honored to join the Food Bank Board of Directors and to contribute to an important mission that improves the lives of not only individuals, but entire communities. Addressing food insecurity through this Food Bank role is one small way, as a Christian, I can assist those in need and serve others."

Carolyn Burnett

Board of Directors

Carolyn is Vice President of Business Banking and Senior Commercial Relationship Manager at UVA Community Credit Union



"I feel immensely connected to the mission and am impressed with the impact the Food Bank has made in our community. I am excited to be a part of it. My foundational cultural traditions growing up revolved around the power of breaking bread with people. Food can be a source of comfort, growth, security, relationship building, and personal and community identity. Pouring work and passion into making sure that everyone in our community has access to these benefits is so meaningful to me."



Get Involved

We hope the stories you've read in this issue of *Harvest* inspire you to take action.

The truth is, we are a community food bank, supported by you and here to serve. And we need many hands and hearts to achieve our shared vision.

Here are some timely ideas that can help you make a local impact this winter or spring.

INVITE A SPEAKER

Volunteer

Advocate

Make a Gift

ORGANIZE AN EVENT

Donate Food

Form a Business Partnership

Coordinate a Food Drive

SHARE OUR STORY

Host an Online Fundraiser

Does your business, organization, school, congregation, or network want to connect with the Food Bank's mission and learn more about those we serve? **INVITE A SPEAKER to join your group in person or virtually.**



INVITE A SPEAKER



Host or attend an event like the 231 Fest where you can have fun, enjoy scenic beauty, and make a difference all at the same time.

Castle Hill Cider teams with other community-minded businesses to highlight all the wonderful things about

this area, primarily how we are stronger together. Mark your calendar for the next 231 Fest on June 15, 2024.



231fest.com

Follow us on social media and share our stories to expand our reach:



Facebook.com/BlueRidgeAreaFoodBank



Instagram.com/brafb



LinkedIn.com/company/blue-ridge-area-food-bank-network



CONTACT US

If you don't see a path that fits you, visit our website at www.brafb.org for more ideas. Or email solvehunger@brafb.org to start a conversation.



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

HATSY VALLAR

CHAIR
Charlottesville, Virginia

DEBBIE METZ

VICE CHAIR
Staunton, Virginia

SHAVONE DUDLEY

SECRETARY
Associate Director of Employer Engagement
and Recruiting
University of Virginia Darden School of Business

NICHOLAS A. PERRINE

IMMEDIATE PAST CHAIR
Director of Wealth Strategies
Graves Light Lenhart

DIEGO ANDERSON

Charlottesville, Virginia

KIM BLOSSER, EDD

President
Laurel Ridge Community College

RON BUCHANAN

Chief Financial Officer
Habitat for Humanity of Greater Charlottesville

CAROLYN BURNETT

Vice President of Business Banking and
Senior Commercial Relationship Manager
UVA Community Credit Union

BOB DAVIS

Vice President, Mid-Atlantic Division
The Kroger Company

GHISLAINE LEWIS, PHD

Associate Professor, Communications Studies,
Lynchburg College
Director, Pierce Street Gateway, Lynchburg

CLINT MERRITT, MD

Chief Clinical Officer for Population Health
Augusta Health

JAMES PERKINS, PHD

President Emeritus
Blue Ridge Community College

CARL ROSBERG

CEO/Owner
CDR Investments LLC

MATT SORENSEN

Vice President
Quad-C Management, Inc.

MICHAEL MCKEE

Ex-Officio

LES SINCLAIR

MANAGING EDITOR
Communications & PR Manager

Food Is Medicine

Together with our network of community partners, the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank is now serving more people each month than before the pandemic. We're all rising to the challenge, but there's no denying the strain on resources and volunteers.

So, when the cost to do so is higher, is this the right time to prioritize health and nutrition in the way we serve our neighbors and communities?

We wrestled with that question for about a minute when the Food Bank's leadership and Board came together last spring to finalize our strategic plan and five-year financial forecast. We had only to help out at Mobile Food Pantries and talk with pantry guests to understand how critically important it is to improve access to food that supports good health.

More than half of the guests we surveyed told us that their health was poor or only fair, and an equal number said someone in their home had health-related dietary restrictions. Chronic, diet-related diseases like diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular disease are common among people who are food-insecure and unable to afford fresh produce, lean protein, and whole grains.

Chronic pain and disabilities are also common among people who have deferred treatment for years because they regularly choose to put food on the table for their families rather than see a doctor for their ailments.

Our neighbors aren't just facing food insecurity, they're facing *nutrition insecurity*.

That's why the Food Bank has redefined its mission to emphasize access to good nutrition and the resources that support health and well-being.

We often say that when you give to the Food Bank, you are giving more than food, you're giving hope. To that I would add that you're also giving a measure of better health.

Thank you!



Michael McKee
Chief Executive Officer





Blue Ridge Area
FOOD BANK
Everyone should have enough to eat.



NON-PROFIT ORG
POSTAGE & FEES
PAID
BLUE RIDGE AREA
FOOD BANK

Headquarters:
P.O. Box 937 | Verona, VA 24482



OUR MISSION is to improve food security through equitable access to good nutrition and the resources that support health and well-being.



SCAN HERE

< To change your mailing information or preferences send an email to donorservices@brafb.org.

LOCATIONS

We serve your community through one of four distribution centers:

Western Region Distribution Center & Headquarters
P.O. Box 937
96 Laurel Hill Road
Verona, VA 24482-0937
P: 540.248.3663

Eastern Region Distribution Center
1207 Harris Street
Charlottesville, VA 22903-5319
P: 434.296.3663

Southern Region Distribution Center
501 12th Street, Suite B
Lynchburg, VA 24504-2527
P: 434.845.4099

Northern Region Distribution Center
1802 Roberts Street
Winchester, VA 22601-6312
P: 540.665.0770



More Fresh Produce Than Ever Before

Produce makes up 1/3 of all food provided by the Food Bank.

We are serious about our vision: nourishing food and good health for everyone, every day. **Last year, the Food Bank distributed 8.1 million pounds of produce.**

