

FOOD *for* THOUGHT

Celebrating Our Past. Embracing Our Future.

MARCH 2022 NEWSLETTER

RIVERBENDFOODBANK.ORG



MEMBER OF
FEEDING
AMERICA

A LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT & CEO

The year 2022 marks the Ruby Anniversary of River Bend Food Bank — the color of our beloved apple-heart logo.

In researching 40 years of history, we've uncovered all kinds of nuggets — from the humble beginnings of our first food distribution in February 1982 to our transformation into a large-scale, commercial distribution center, all for people who do not have enough food.

We look forward to sharing anecdotes of our treasured history throughout this anniversary year, and we start from the very beginning (a very good place to start — I was in *The Sound of Music* twice) with an interview with Tom & Caren Laughlin. Our founding Executive Director and First Lady, the Laughlins started River Bend Food Bank from scratch in 1982 and built it up to distribute 7.3 million meals in 2014 before retiring in 2015 after 33 years of service.

Later that year, we set a goal of tripling food distribution by 2025. And only because of your tremendous support, we achieved that goal 4 years early, distributing **22.4 million meals** in FY2021.

When Tom & Caren moved the Food Bank to our current location in 2014, the facility was three times bigger than the previous location in Moline, Illinois — 60,000 sq. ft. vs. 20,000 — but we are now distributing three times as much food.

Which brings us to some exciting news. On February 15, we announced **Expanding to End Hunger**, a multi-million-dollar capital campaign for River Bend Food Bank. This campaign, combined with our existing branch in Dubuque, Iowa, the addition of our new branch in Galesburg, Illinois later this year, and what we hope someday will be a third branch in the eastern quadrant of our service area, will provide the capacity necessary to meet the goal of ending hunger in every geography we serve, entirely with nutritious food.

Each of you has made a portion of our 40 years possible, from the very beginning to relocating to this facility to the tremendous growth in recent years to meeting the huge spike in need caused by the COVID pandemic. For supporting each of those steps, you have my most sincere thanks. We now invite you to participate in the most important project in our history.

Together, **we will end hunger**. Will you join us?



Michael P. Miller
President & CEO



FROM VINEGAR TO VEGETABLES: FOUNDING DIRECTOR REFLECTS ON RIVER BEND FOOD BANK'S 40-YEAR HISTORY

Mike Miller, current president & CEO of River Bend Food Bank (2015 — present), recently sat down with Tom Laughlin, founding executive director (1982 — 2015) and his wife, Caren - former director of marketing for the Food Bank, to talk about the past, present, and future of the Food Bank as we celebrate its 40th anniversary.

Mike: As we tell the story of the Food Bank and its future, we really want to put it in the context of the past. So, tell us — how and why did you both get involved?



40 YEARS OF MILESTONES

1982 – River Bend Food Reservoir is formed. Located in small space at 1209 4th Ave., Moline, IL



→ **1982** – First distribution to partner agencies: bottles of grapefruit juice donated by Greater Chicago Food Depository



Tom sighs, smiles, and says, “I was at a crossroads in my career in 1982. At that time, the Food Bank had just been founded as River Bend Food Reservoir. When I heard about the concept of food banking, which was brand new, I thought it made a lot of sense. I got an opportunity to interview with Bud Vogel (co-founder and long-time Board Chair) and started at the Food Bank’s first location over in Moline. After about 30 days, I told Bud ‘I’m going to need some help,’ because I was the only employee!” Tom laughs. “I knew Steve Wagenecht since childhood, and I can’t say enough about what he did for us. Steve ran the warehouse and was my right-hand man for the next three decades.”

Caren adds, “To hear of all the food that was being wasted and how successfully it could be redistributed to those in need ... we just ... we never had any doubts. We never looked back. It was just the right thing to do.” She smiles at Tom. “Now, I admit, I changed my mind a couple of times early on when I realized how hard it was to solicit food...”

Mike interjects, “So, tell us about some of those first-year experiences, getting donations.”

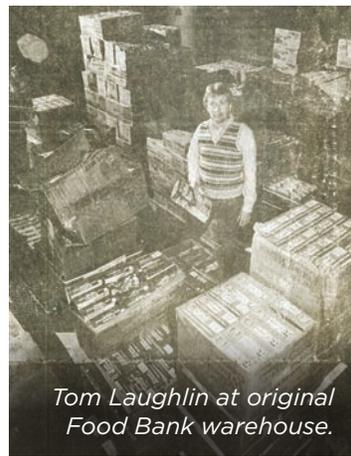
“Well, the Greater Chicago Food Depository sent over our very first donation for distribution in February of 1982 — half a semi of grapefruit juice.” Tom says. He and Caren both chuckle. “And we were told to make sure we shake up the glass bottles for an agency, because grapefruit sediment settles at the bottom of the bottle and doesn’t look too appealing.”

Tom: “In the early days, I’d have a spreadsheet of the handful of food items we had. A pantry would call, tell me what they wanted, usually small quantities of items - three cans of corn, one loaf of bread, etc., and I’d go and count it out and set it aside.”

That first year, River Bend Food Reservoir distributed 190,000 pounds of food through partner agencies.

Mike smiles, “We now distribute around 500,000 pounds of food every week. We scan food items into our online inventory system and track all the orders in real-time with a fully computerized database.”

Caren comments, “I remember Tom coming home after spending the day trying to get (food) donations. He’d say, ‘This store gave us five-gallon drums of vinegar.’ And I’d think ‘Oh, it HAS to get better than this!’” She smiles and squeezes Tom’s shoulder. “And it did.”



Tom Laughlin at original Food Bank warehouse.



Steve Wagenecht loads pallets of bread at original Food Bank location.

“Community businesses and many organizations have been very supportive, since the beginning, of the work the Food Bank does,” Mike offers. “Can you talk a little about that?”

Caren responds, “It was the farm implement crisis that really was the catalyst for a lot of food pantries to form in the 1980s, and the Food Bank was needed to support them. I’m proud of our community. We’re a community that really cares about people.”

River Bend Food Bank worked with 70 partner organizations — food pantries, childcare centers, senior living complexes, during the first year. Today, the Food Bank distributes over 20 million meals through more than 300 partner agencies across 23 counties in eastern Iowa and western Illinois.

Tom adds, “Every day I was thankful to be there.” Tom chokes up a bit. “It was a huge blessing.”

“If people could see the face of hunger like we see...,” Caren reflects. “People don’t want others to know that they don’t have food. When we first had the backpack program, I would see kids getting their food and clutching it like their life depended on it. It has a huge impact on you to see that.”

Tom replies, “Food insecurity is truly a bi-partisan issue. We can all still agree that no one should go hungry. We are so excited about the growth. We want the Food Bank to continue to grow.”

Mike: “We are honored to continue your legacy. The foundation you built in the community was solid. We’re excited to grow through our capital campaign project, especially as we go into our 40th year.”

→ **1983** – River Bend Food Bank is 53rd food bank (out of 200) to join the Feeding America network (then called Second Harvest)

→ **1990** – River Bend Food Bank moves to larger location at 309 12th St., Moline, IL with 20,000 sq. ft.



→ **1995** – First Kids’ Café hosted — Friendly House in Davenport, IA



2010 – First mobile food pantry hosted at Mulford Church in Muscatine, IA

BREAKING GROUND FOR A NEW BEGINNING

Celebrating the 40-year anniversary with a renewed investment in building a hunger-free community for future generations.

Growing Programs to Meet Future Needs

- To support and protect the hundreds of agency partners who face the elements year-round to pick up food for their pantries, this campaign creates a covered, secure, accessible pick up area.
- Thousands of volunteers donate their time each year to support the crucial programs keeping people fed. Creating a devoted workspace allows larger volunteer groups to safely and comfortably perform this valuable work.



Amy Jones (campaign co-chair), Coburn Gillies (Constituent Advocate for Rep. Cheri Bustos' office), Rev. Dwight Ford (Project NOW), Mike Matson (Mayor of Davenport, IA), Adam Gregg (Lt. Gov. of IA), Nate Clark (campaign co-chair), and Mike Miller (President & CEO of River Bend Food Bank) turn over corn kernels at a ceremonial groundbreaking on February 15, 2022. The corn symbolizes food being central to the mission and commemorates the John Deere Foundation's initial investment in 1982 that helped grow the Food Bank into what it is today.



"Those who face food insecurity have an abiding friend in the Food Bank in both advocacy and action! Our future is bright because of their expansion of facilities, capacities, and partnerships with Project NOW and others, all working to end the causes of food insecurity and poverty."

- Rev. Dwight Ford,
executive director,
Project NOW



Increasing Food Safety & Security

- Creating a single, secure delivery area for the 60+ semi-trucks regularly bringing food to the warehouse increases food security and meets best practice standards for food defense, while providing a clear access point for large deliveries.

"There will be a day when no child, no adult, no senior goes to bed hungry in our community. That's our goal. That's why we're building today to meet tomorrow's challenges."

- Mike Miller, President & CEO of River Bend Food Bank

PARTNER AGENCY PROFILE: THE CONVIVIUM URBAN FARMSTEAD, DUBUQUE, IOWA



Why did you and your husband found the Convivium? We both “retired” from corporate life to do something more meaningful and give something back to the world. We asked ourselves the question: “What problem do we want to solve?” And the answer to that was the problem of disconnection — so much of the trouble we have in our world comes from a basic lack of connection — to our neighbors, to the environment, to our food source. From that seed of an idea, we found the greenhouse spaces that we eventually remodeled into Convivium and that is where the idea of using food to connect people started. Who can argue with food? We all need to eat, and food is a great connector.



Mike Muench and Leslie Shalabi, Convivium co-founders



What do you hope the Convivium accomplishes for the community? Our mission as an organization is to improve people’s lives through food. So that is what we hope to do! Whether that is to provide direct services — such as our free casserole program or to teach classes about gardening and nutrition or to host events that bring people together to celebrate.



What would you say to someone who is experiencing a crisis and isn’t sure about coming to you/St. Stephen’s for food support? We hope to make visiting us as easy

as possible — there is no income requirement and the paperwork you fill out is very simple. (We just want to collect demographic information) It is also a very friendly environment, and the volunteers who hand out the food are the same each week, so you are able to develop a relationship with them over time. We are also a restaurant, which I think helps with some of the reticence about visiting a traditional food pantry or feeding site. But in general, if we can help alleviate the pressure of even one meal a week for someone, that is one less meal to think about and perhaps that money/time can be spent doing something else beneficial for you and your family.



What does a hunger-free community look like to you? A hunger-free community to us looks like: kids going to school with full bellies — ready to learn; one where fast food

is an occasional treat and not an everyday source of “nutrition”; a garden on every corner or curb strip where people can enjoy the produce and know where their food comes from; one where people at least occasionally slow down and cook at home from scratch using healthy, wholesome ingredients.

Learn more about the Convivium at convivium-dbuq.com.

2010 – Bushels for Hunger partnership launched – area farmers donate portion of crops each year to Food Bank. Over 1.2M meals as of 2021!



2014 – River Bend Food Bank moves to current 60,000 sq. ft. warehouse at 4010 Kimmel Dr., Davenport, IA

2015 – Tom Laughlin retires as executive director turning over leadership to Mike Miller



2018 – Student Hunger Drive merges with the Food Bank



RIVER BEND
FOOD BANK

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Annual Report: FY21 (July 2020 - June 2021)

Mission: To lead the community-wide effort to end hunger in eastern Iowa and western Illinois.



325 FOOD INDUSTRY PARTNERS

The U.S. throws away over 35 billion pounds of food each year. Instead of food in our service area going to waste, food donations from manufacturers, distributors, and grocers gave 14.1 million meals - 61% of all meals distributed.

22,457,829 total meals distributed

BACKPACK PROGRAM



83,490
BACKPACKS
DISTRIBUTED

One in five children faces food insecurity in our service area. Every week during the school year, 3,000 children each receive six, kid-friendly meals to take home for the weekend.

MOBILE FOOD PANTRIES



377 MOBILE
PANTRIES
FACILITATED

Mobile pantries partner with community organizations in rural areas and food deserts, to bring food where it's most needed.

SCHOOL PANTRIES



54 SCHOOL
FOOD PANTRY
SITES

Pantries across the service area provide safe places in local schools where students and their families can access food on an as-needed basis.

SENIOR PROGRAMS



10 SENIOR
FOOD PANTRY
SITES

Adults over 65 make up 17% of our neighbors facing hunger. Pantries inside senior living complexes give access to healthy food for those with limited mobility.

SERVICE INSIGHTS & CLIENT EMPOWERMENT



10,424
INDIVIDUALS
CONNECTED

With the Link2Feed database, individuals who need additional community resources or support can be identified and paired with a Services Coordinator

AGENCY PARTNERSHIPS



16,303,773 MEALS
PROVIDED THROUGH
PARTNERS

VOLUNTEERS



1,367 VOLUNTEERS
GAVE
11,413 HOURS



2019 - St. Stephen's Food Bank merges with River Bend Food Bank



2019 - SouthPark and NorthPark Mall Food Pantries open to Quad Cities residents

2020 - Record surpassed for meals distributed in a single month: 2 million



2021 - Plans announced to build 2nd branch in Galesburg, IL to better serve southern counties

2022 - River Bend Food Bank celebrates its 40th anniversary





BE PART OF A UNIQUE MOMENT IN RIVER BEND FOOD BANK HISTORY!

With your support, the Food Bank will have the capacity to meet tomorrow's challenges and distribute more food to those who need it than ever before. Together, we WILL build a hunger-free community for generations to come. Go online to make your gift of any size in support of the Expanding to End Hunger campaign: riverbendfoodbank.org/endlunger

SHARE YOUR STORY

Tell us how the Food Bank has impacted your life at riverbendfoodbank.org/sharestory.



"My father, my husband, and another family member passed away within months of each other in 2017. I had time on my hands and was looking to help others and deal with my grief. Volunteering at the Food Bank has helped me as much as I've helped others."

- Ann Austin, River Bend Food Bank Volunteer

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Ben Patterson

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Find Food

Find a pantry near you. Learn if you qualify for state food assistance programs.

Volunteer

See individual and small group opportunities near you. Learn how your organization can get members involved.

Give

Host a funds drive. Find out if your employer matches donations and support River Bend Food Bank's mission.



4010 Kimmel Drive
Davenport, IA 52802-2404

riverbendfoodbank.org

