See a **Need.**
Take the **Lead.**

**HAI CLAY AND THE COMMUNITY WARRIORS**

After serving 26 years in the Army – an Infantryman, Army Ranger, sniper, recruiter, air assault soldier – Hai Clay had a stellar military career. He just wasn’t ready to stop and be “retired.” After returning to Columbus, Ga. he found volunteer opportunities in the community and with all of his leadership experience, has founded a new non-profit organization – The Community Warriors.

The Community Warriors is a mixture of veterans and non-veterans interested in serving the community and they are ready to help when they are needed. Whether they are painting historic buildings for a living museum at Westville, planting gardens at a local battered women’s shelter, building benches at the YMCA, or distributing food for Feeding the Valley, one senses a strong esprit de corps among all of the volunteers. Their spirit of enthusiasm for volunteering in their community is contagious.

These professionals have the mobile pantry food distribution down to a perfect science. It is an organized, orderly, and streamlined process. Once a month they pass out food in Columbus and then again in Phenix City, serving hundreds of people and averaging more than 60,000 pounds every month. It’s one of the activities that Hai enjoys best because “... you get to see the faces of the people we are helping, and you hear their stories,” he says with a passion in his voice. “These are people who really need our help and appreciate it. It just feels good.”

We are grateful and salute these Warriors.

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Give a few hours, feed many, and make a big impact!

This is what we tell our volunteers that pass through our doors every day. Whether they are sorting canned goods, helping in the cooler, packing mobile pantry boxes, working in the warehouse, sorting produce, or repacking bulk foods in the kitchen — they are a big part of making a difference in someone’s life.

People want to feel like they matter to others. Volunteer work is important to individual and community well-being, quality of life, and makes communities stronger. We live in a community that is rich with people who want to serve others. Last year more than 24,000 hours was gifted to us by people wanting to help others. Our volunteers are a valuable asset to our operations and we could not serve the people who need our help without them.

The Community Warriors story in the newsletter is a perfect example of servant leadership at its best. We are truly blessed to have a strong relationship with this organization and they are part of our Feeding The Valley family.

The story we share about students helping young students with the BackSnacks Program in Harris County, Georgia is an example of young leaders who hear the calling to reach out to other students and help by making sure they have food for the weekends.

Putting personal lives on hold to take food and supplies to areas impacted by the incredible wrath of Hurricane Michael and helping people they did not know, shows the compassion and selflessness of people who feel the need to help.

Our Young at Heart Seniors Program lifts up our volunteers who knock on doors and check on our senior neighbors and make sure they have what they need.

We started The Big Gobble event at Thanksgiving last year and fed our seniors, disabled, and homebound neighbors. The community came together, many as families, to volunteer to prep the meals, package, and deliver them on Thanksgiving Day. They just wanted to make a special day of thanks special.

The spirit of volunteerism is a hallmark of our country since it was founded. These stories are about the “points of light in a broad and beautiful sky” and are just a few of the examples of what makes America a great nation.

It’s simply people helping people and expecting nothing in return.

Sincerely,

Frank Sheppard
President & CEO

Food For Thought

Hunger Doesn’t Take The Weekend Off

HARRIS COUNTY BACKSNACKS

Five years ago, Harris County, Ga. High School Senior Katelyn Flynn started the Harris County BackSnacks program for students in her community as her senior project. This program provides kid-friendly foods for children to take home for the weekend. When Katelyn left for college, her brother Grant and Emily King continued managing the program and now, as a Pre-Med student at CSU, Emily leads the program for the Harris County community. “When I first joined this program as a high school junior, I did not realize that Harris County even had children that resided in food insecure homes. Now, almost five years later, I hope everyone sees the need to fight food insecurity wherever they live. All children deserve a chance and no child should have to worry when their next meal will be given. I implore our Harris County residents to educate themselves on the needs of their county so that we can work together selflessly to make a change,” says Emily.

Five years later, the program has increased from serving 10 students to 70 students at local elementary schools. Harris County BackSnacks is a non-profit organization and partners with us for most of the food items they pack. During the holidays, food boxes were sent home for the students during their holiday break. St. Nicholas Episcopal Church in Hamilton offers their space for storing supplies and for volunteers to pack the grocery bags that are inserted into the back packs. And, volunteers help deliver the bags to the schools.

 Entirely student led, this is a great example of “community” and serving others.
People Helping People

DISASTER RELIEF: HURRICANE MICHAEL

For the second hurricane season in a row, we were called into action during Hurricane Michael when it devastated parts of Florida and South Georgia. As a part of the Feeding America network of foodbanks, we are prepared to respond and help. Several of our partner food banks south of our region were affected by the storm, so we came to the call to fill in the gap. More than 149,000 pounds of food and supplies were distributed as well as about 10,000 hot meals to those in need and first responders. As our community of churches, organizations, and individuals mobilized to take food and supplies to impacted communities, we helped fill their trucks with as much food and produce as their vehicle could hold.

From a facebook post of one of the many volunteers, Sharayah Davis: “Huge thanks to Feeding the Valley in Columbus, Ga. They have loaded ColGa ACTS up several weekends now and sent us to Florida with food. Because of their generosity, THOUSANDS of meals have been distributed already ... today they packed enough meat to feed what they assumed would be 300 people, but will be closer to a couple thousand! My heart is full. So thankful to all the donors who have given food, clothes, money, and time to help our neighbors. THIS IS MY AMERICA!”

The Golden Years

YOUNG AT HEART

“Do I buy my medicines, or food?” The golden years ... senior hunger poses unique challenges. After a lifetime of hard work, 63% of the households with older adults (50+) that Feeding America serves find themselves facing impossible choices. It’s one of America’s best kept secrets. In the world’s wealthiest nation, no senior should go hungry.

Last summer, we expanded our Senior Program to include our “Young at Heart” mobile pantry. Partnering with the Phenix City, Alabama Housing Authority, our volunteers visit each resident in the H.L. Blake senior residential neighborhood once a month and deliver non-perishable food, produce, bread, and dairy door-to-door. They sure are happy to see a smiling face when they answer the door. There are lots of warm hugs from these very grateful people.

Kids Café

BATTLING THE MOUNTAIN OF HUNGER

Our Kids Café program was highlighted during the Wells Fargo Holiday Food Bank Food Drive in December and a video documentary was featured on Good Morning America. Christina Harris, mother of two, talked about her struggle after not receiving food stamps any longer. “I was struggling to find a way to feed my kids,” she says. “Kids Café in my neighborhood helps me feed my kids and I know they are getting a nutritious meal.”

Our Kids Café Program has 28 sites in Columbus and Phenix City, providing about 1,700 meals a day to children after school. In the summer, we expand and serve 2,400 meals a day.

It’s our mission to make sure that children are receiving food and not experiencing hunger. “It’s not fun to feel hungry,” says Deborah Thomas with Kids Café. “When you eat, you’re a different person.”

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Changing Lives one meal at a time

Empty Bowl
A PROMISE TO END HUNGER

In 1995, the Columbus Housing Authority, Columbus Parks and Recreation and the Interfaith Action Food Bank (now Feeding the Valley), worked together to establish the first Kids Café site in the Booker T. Washington apartments. Solving child hunger was the focus of these entities and today, it continues to be a priority.

Today, we have 28 Kids Café sites and prepare more than 1,700 meals a day for children after school. These sites are in public housing neighborhoods and at local non-profit organizations that have after school programs such as Columbus Parks and Recreation, Open Door Community House, YMCA, Girls Inc., and others.

Columbus Parks and Recreation has been our partner throughout this journey and every year hosts an Empty Bowl luncheon to support Kids Café. Empty Bowl is a grass roots movement to raise awareness about hunger.

Artists are creating and painting bowls throughout the year for a Sunday luncheon in early March and throughout the community, people are painting pre-made bowls. At the luncheon, guests choose their bowl or bowls and enjoy a meal of soup and delicious side items. All proceeds from the sale of these meals benefit the Kids Café Program at Feeding the Valley. Together we can solve child hunger.

Please join us at the 2019 Empty Bowl Luncheon:
March 10, 11:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. at Northside Recreation Center, 2010 American Way, Columbus, GA

The Big Gobble

The energy at Feeding the Valley during Thanksgiving week 2018 was high! We made great use of our 3,000 square foot commercial kitchen and had turkeys cooking everywhere for days. Volunteers came in shifts throughout the week to cook turkeys and prepare all of the side dishes to go along with the holiday meal. On Thanksgiving morning at 5 a.m. they were ready to begin the assembly line to prepare meal boxes that went out for deliveries that morning. With the help of 350 volunteers, 1,300 meals were prepared. The recipients of these holiday meals were people referred by agencies who were homebound, disabled, and did not have a place to go on Thanksgiving. It was truly a day of thanks and giving.