A Bold Decision

Her childhood was colored with mental, physical and sexual abuse, bullying, and rejection from her family; which later in her young adult life, transitioned into drug use, unwed pregnancy, rape, and legal problems. It’s not a pretty picture, and took a lot of faith, caring and love of the special programs and people at different organizations and ministries to help her get back on her feet again and turn her life in a positive direction. She found that love and faith at The House of T.I.M.E. (This I Must Earn) in Columbus, Georgia, a structured and community based homeless women’s recovery program and our Partner Agency.

In, 2010, she came to work at Feeding the Valley Food Bank, because her drive and strong work ethic was noticed after many months serving as a volunteer. The legal problems she has experienced make it almost impossible for a company to hire her. But, this didn’t matter at Feeding the Valley. All anyone cared about was looking forward and not back. She has proven that by working hard, being conscientious and making good decisions, she’s a leader and has earned the trust of her supervisors and her team. It has been a transformational experience and we are glad that we have been part of it. Today, Margalena is our Food Sourcing Manager.

But, wait. There’s more! Over the last four years, Margalena has attended Troy University and recently graduated magna cum laude with a Bachelor of Science degree in Global Business.

“I’ve been blessed because my educational and professional journey at Feeding the Valley has been as important to the organization as it has been to me. The managers I work for have believed in me and have always encouraged me. Their prayer for me to succeed has been completely selfless,” she says.

Today Margalena is a strong role model and influences others who are on the journey of recovery by sharing her experiences and through volunteering at the House of T.I.M.E. She also serves on the board of the United Way’s Home for Good.

There’s no stopping her now.
2019 was a phenomenal year for Feeding the Valley food bank. A year of growth, a year of great team work, and a year of continued confidence in our organization. To say that we are proud is an understatement.

In the late spring of 2019, unexpected opportunities came to us and we accepted the challenge. Adding four new counties is not a small feat, but our team did it without a glitch. We became operational in Dougherty, Calhoun, Lee and Terrell counties within 90 days and our food distribution in this region is increasing every month. We were excited to start providing hot, nutritious meals for children at the YMCA in early February. These meals are currently being prepared in our commercial kitchen in Columbus and transported in warming units to Albany. Our long-term goal is to find a local resource to prepare these meals and expand into a Kids Café Program.

Our new counties have embraced us as their community food bank and welcomed us warmly, and we are actively growing our Partner Agency base. An Advisory Committee representing these counties that includes local community leaders has been established to offer us guidance as we continue to branch out our programs and services. The poverty rate and statistics for this region indicates that there is great need, and help from the leaders of the community is crucial. Building strong relationships and collaborating with local industry and companies is important to help us do this. Every day we ask ourselves, “What can we do to make things better?”

Our presence in Cuthbert was a long time goal and it was great to see it happen in July. With the help of the Servant Leadership students at Andrew College as volunteers, we are distributing more than 38,000 lbs. of food each month through our Mobile Pantry program in Randolph County. With their help, we are making a bigger impact on one of the most impoverished counties in our state.

The holidays brought us more surprises. Our goal for our Thanksgiving event, The Big Gobble was to deliver 1,200 hot turkey meals Thanksgiving morning. We exceeded and delivered more than 1,500 meals for homebound and elderly people. It was a great day of thanks and giving.

It’s not every day that a tractor trailer from Provo, Utah drives up to our back dock with a donation of 40,000 lbs. food. We were delighted to receive these non-perishables from the Church of Latter Day Saints and felt like it was a Christmas blessing.

Volunteers make our community stronger! The Community Warriors volunteers continue to help us with Mobile Pantry distributions in Columbus and Phenix City, Ala. and average more than 90,000 lbs. of food a month at both locations. And, our distribution out of our LaGrange warehouse which serves our northern counties continues to grow.

We couldn’t be happier about all the growth of all of our programs. We are helping more people each month and we are amazed that our volunteer base continues to expand. Volunteers are the engine that keeps us moving forward.

It’s all about collaboration and team work and it does make the dream work!

Sincerely,

Frank Sheppard
President & CEO
When you ask about Juanita Nixon these are the words people use to describe her. Whether she is working one on one and providing food for a family in need through the Cutliff Resource Center, or there is a national disaster and she is distributing clothing and shingles nationally through World Vision, there is no doubt that her heart and soul are devoted to assisting people and making their lives better. She is highly respected in the Albany community.

We know that one in three people in Albany, Ga. live in poverty (Albany’s poverty rate is 31%) and we’re the main food source for this community. Last summer, when we expanded into Dougherty County, we were told that the first person we needed to connect with was Juanita. As we began to pick up food donations from the local grocery stores (and before we had a way to warehouse food), we took it to her facility and she saw to it that it was distributed to the community through the Cutliff Grove Resource Center.

Cutliff Grove became one of our first partner agencies in Dougherty County. As a non-profit organization, Cutliff offers food and housing assistance for low income families. Through our Mobile Pantry Program, more than 1,000 families are being helped a month at Cutliff. “The presence of Feeding the Valley is a new beginning for Albany. This partnership is enabling other non-profit organizations to supply the necessary resources needed in all parts of the community. It is empowering us to connect and partner with other organizations in the community that provide assistance services. We have been enlightened by the management style at Feeding the Valley and their commitment to help our region. It is a blessing and a true partnership,” says Juanita.

It was our good fortune to connect with this community icon and our relationship continues to grow as we find new ways to collaborate.

The Empty Bowl movement is a reminder that people everywhere experience hunger. For 27 years, the Empty Bowl Charity Luncheon in Columbus, Ga. hosted by Columbus Parks and Recreation, has been an important community event to bring awareness about child hunger. Beautiful hand crafted bowls are made by local potters as well as hand painted bowls designed by community groups, employees from local companies, and children in the community. It is a wonderful event and brings a diverse group of people together to raise funds for our Kids Café Program.

We thank our friends at Columbus Parks and Recreation and the wonderful potters at the Britt David Cultural Arts Center for hosting this event for us every year.
In 2007, the pastor at Shoals Creek Church in LaGrange received a call from a family in need during the holidays. They took care of this family but realized that this was not just a Christmas need, it was an everyday need. This was the beginning of Good Sam Ministry.

The food insecurity rate in Troup County is 17.3%; a little more than 12,000 people. We know that for many children, the cupboards are bare at home. With the help of Good Sam Ministry, a lot of Troup County kids are going home from school with food for the weekend.

With the help of community donations for their program, it’s very convenient for Good Sam to get their food from our LaGrange warehouse. “We have a wonderful partnership with Feeding the Valley for our food supply. We can make our funds go a long way,” says Jennifer Kelly, one of the directors of Good Sam.

With the support of Shoals Creek Church, they are able to warehouse a supply of non-perishable food on shelves in a building behind the church. On a packing Saturday all the food is organized on long tables, and the assembly line begins. It took less than 30 minutes to pack more than 900 food bags. What a great way for everyone to serve their community!

Jayne Pauley, RN and HOSA teacher at Thinc Academy in LaGrange brings her students to volunteer on packing day. “I know that we pack more than 900 food bags each month, and I am pretty sure that some of the students receiving food are my students. That’s impactful and it means so much to me to instill values of empathy in my students. This is the easiest service project that makes the biggest impact on our community,” she says.

It takes another group of volunteers to deliver these bags to schools every week. Working closely with counselors in the school system, students are identified for the program. It’s a discreet process to ensure that the dignity of these children is always respected. “As a school, we cannot provide all the resources that students need. Obviously food is a basic need, and those needs need to be met before a student can learn. If students are thinking about food and they are hungry, they cannot concentrate and have the ability learn,” says Natalie Doerr, Counselor at Hollis Han Elementary School.

Good Sam is passionately led by Lee Holmes and Jennifer Kelly and an army of volunteers who believe that no child should ever be hungry.