

## SERVING UP HOPE TOGETHER

The Great Food Pantry Makeover strikes again! Every year, this program brings a much-needed boost to Feeding the Valley's partner agencies, and 2025 was no exception. This year, the Albany Rescue Mission received a grant to re-floor their kitchen. After 40 years of wear and tear, the flooring was recently flagged during a health and safety inspection.

As you might guess, replacing flooring can be a costly ordeal, and the rescue mission was faced with how to tackle the problem. Enter Food Lion!

Their grants program, Food Lion Feeds, addresses hunger and food insecurity in communities like ours. The timing was perfect. Applis McGrady, Executive Director at the rescue mission, jumped at the opportunity for the Food Lion Feeds grant. The funds covered the costs and labor that were required to level the subfloor, making the kitchen a safe, more efficient space. But the transformation didn't stop there: throughout September, volunteers turned out in massive numbers, packing emergency food bags, hygiene kits, and distributing warm meals to families and individuals facing hunger.

And, as an added bonus, two pallets of food arrived, meaning the mission can stock their pantry and be ready to serve the community. Thanks to the flooring renovations and meal resources, Albany Rescue Mission can continue to provide hot meals—often up to 150 a day—and distribute thousands of pounds of food every week.

"We are incredibly grateful to Food Lion for their donation," said Applis. "They've transformed our kitchen into a safe, efficient space. Not only has this enhanced our operations, but it's lifted our spirits, too. Thanks to Food Lion for helping us nourish our neighbors with care and dignity!"



# FRESH THOUGHTS

From Frank Sheppard, President & CEO



## Partner Agency Mini Grants

The past few months have brought their share of challenges. Ongoing food shortages, reduced federal funding, a government shutdown, and cuts to SNAP and Medicaid have left most of us feeling anxious. But even during these difficulties, we're thrilled to share some great news!

Thanks to special capacity-building funds from Feeding America, we've been able to invest directly in our partner agencies through a new mini grant program. These grants are designed for

short-term, smaller projects: purchasing coolers, freezers, and other essential equipment, or using the funds as food credits. By purchasing food at wholesale costs and creating ways of storing fresh food safely, we're stretching every dollar even further, ensuring more nutritious food reaches our neighbors in need.



It's exciting to see these funds at work, strengthening our network and helping our partners serve their communities even better.

## Neighbor Market

And there is more good news! Thanks to a generous grant, we've launched our new Neighbor Market, a welcoming, thoughtfully designed space to help hardworking families who are still struggling to put food on their tables.

The Neighbor Market operates in the evenings, which better accommodates visitors with busy work schedules. It also uses a "choice" model, designed to mimic



the average grocery shopping experience. Guests can choose foods they know they'll use and enjoy, rather than pre-packaged bags or boxes. The result is a warm, inviting space where everyone feels comfortable and respected.

Because everyone deserves a dignified shopping experience, and no one should ever feel ashamed for needing a little help.

## Community Hunger Relief Fund

Thanks to you, our Community Hunger Relief Fund continues to gain momentum and inspire generosity across the communities we serve. It's truly a beautiful reflection of unity and compassion, neighbors helping neighbors, standing together to fight hunger.



## Thank You

Every act of giving, large or small, makes a real difference. Your trust, kindness, and support make everything we do possible.

From all of us at Feeding the Valley, thank you for being such an important part of this mission. We are deeply grateful to you!

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to be "Frank Sheppard".

Frank Sheppard  
President & CEO

# ALBANY YOUNG MARINES NAMED UNIT OF THE YEAR


**OOHRAH!** We were thrilled to celebrate with the Albany Young Marines, honored as the 2025 Unit of the Year!

The Albany chapter doesn't just train—they serve. These young people have been volunteers at our warehouse for years and have come to be a beloved part of the Feeding the Valley family. As we celebrated in our fall newsletter, they show up ready to work, with positive attitudes and a heart for service.

The award came as a surprise to Eric Crump, the Albany Young Marines' Unit Commander. He had decided to reboot the program four and a half years ago and now leads a group of more than 50 young people.

"It's great news for Albany, and it's great news for them," he says. "They can stand proud and tall with this recognition. We're also blessed with having MCLB Albany (the Marine Corps Logistics Base) right next door, which allows us to have active-duty Marines as mentors to help with the kids, as well."

The Young Marines is a national, non-profit youth program that allows young people to embody leadership, discipline, service, and volunteerism—values that shine bright in everything they do.



Launched in 1959, the organization is open to boys and girls ages 8 through high school graduation. This national program focuses on growing character, discipline, and commitment to living a healthy, drug-free lifestyle. Participants learn the importance of self-confidence, academic achievement, good citizenship, and honoring the sacrifices of our nation's veterans.

Their drive and dedication are beyond inspiring, and we couldn't be prouder to cheer them on for this well-earned honor. **What an incredible accomplishment for this amazing group!**

Feeding the Valley simply could not do what we do without the dedicated work of our volunteers. Want to get involved? There are plenty of opportunities!

- Prepare and serve meals as a kitchen volunteer
- Sort donated grocery products and pack food boxes in our warehouse
- Prepare and distribute holiday meal boxes
- Load, pack, and distribute food for Mobile Pantry services

**To learn about upcoming volunteer opportunities or to register, please visit [feedingthevalley.org/volunteer/](https://feedingthevalley.org/volunteer/)**

## HERE'S TO YOU!

To all of our volunteers, partner agencies, community supporters, and our incredible donors, thank you!

This spring, we especially wish to thank our partner agencies, in particular those who have been recognized at our Annual Partner Agency Training Meeting:

**Helping Hands** – "Growth & Impact Award"

**Positive Youth Direction** – "Community Voice Award"

**McAfee Grove Missionary Baptist Church** – "Expanding Hope Award"

**These are the partners who are on the front lines, welcoming neighbors day in and day out, working to ensure that anyone in our community facing food insecurity has somewhere to turn.**



# FEEDING YOUNG MINDS: SCHOOL PANTRIES MAKING A DIFFERENCE

For students facing hunger, school pantries are a lifeline.

Imagine running late, skipping breakfast, and starting the day hungry. It's a long time until lunch, and focusing on schoolwork is tough when your tummy is rumbling.



Thankfully, there's a school pantry to the rescue! Students can grab a cereal bar or snack and head to class ready to learn. Located in a designated space within the school, these pantries complement meal programs by providing nutritious food during and after school hours.

These pantries are more than just shelves of food; they're shelves of opportunity. By ensuring students have access to the nourishment they need, school pantries help young people focus better, feel supported, and thrive both academically and socially.

Together, we're helping schools nourish bright futures, one student, one snack, one pantry at a time.



Thanks to our friends at Publix, we will be rolling out a second Mobile Farmers Market truck in the coming months! That means more fresh fruits and veggies on the move to nourish seniors and families across all 18 counties.

## GOBBLE... GOBBLE... GOBBLE...

It's a special day we look forward to every year, Thanksgiving and The Big Gobble!

Our entire community comes together with heart and purpose, from the dedicated teams helping with meal prep to the volunteers who deliver hot meals on Thanksgiving morning. In fact, volunteers start signing up as early as September because this day means so much to so many.

This year, we touched all of our 18 counties, delivering more than 5,000 Thanksgiving meals to families, homebound and disabled neighbors, veterans, and the homeless.

We are deeply grateful for the generous sponsors who make this beloved tradition possible:

- Maria Fondal Hill of Hope Foundation
- Kemps Dalton West Flooring
- Fred Taylor Company, Inc.
- Nucor
- Anonymous Sponsor

With their support, neighbors across our region will experience the warmth, dignity, and care of a community that shows up for one another.

## LETTUCE CELEBRATE!

## LOOKING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Visit our website [feedingthevalley.org](http://feedingthevalley.org) for ways to get involved! You can donate food, start a food drive, volunteer at the Food Bank, or make a donation. Join us in ensuring that no one in our community goes hungry.

