

STIRRING UP HOPE

For the Feeding the Valley Food Bank culinary team, coming to work every day isn't just a job: it's personal.

Every morning, the kitchen comes to life as they prepare over 2,000 meals to make sure children in our community have the food they need to learn, grow, and simply be kids. And in the summer, the Kids Café and other partner programs grow to 5,000 meals a day.

"These meals do more than fill stomachs. They help children focus, play, and fully participate in a safe, nurturing environment."

Each meal is planned and prepared with the same care and attention they would give their own families. They know that for many children, these meals help turn hunger into hope, giving kids the energy they need to learn, play, and thrive. Our drivers carefully pack the meals and take them off in vans and trucks to deliver them to Columbus, Phenix City, LaGrange, and Albany.



The Feeding the Valley Food Bank culinary team

And the care doesn't stop there.

From that same kitchen, meals are also prepared for our community's seniors. These are neighbors who have spent their lives building our community and now deserve comfort, dignity, and good nutrition in return.

Because of your generosity, these meals reach children and seniors across our region every single day.

Our partners see the impact firsthand. As one leader from the Albany Area YMCA shared, "These meals do more than fill stomachs. They help children focus, play, and fully participate in a safe, nurturing environment."

Your compassion truly reaches across generations. Because of you, children and seniors are nourished and cared for, and our community is stronger.

FRESH THOUGHTS

From Frank Sheppard, President & CEO



Launching the Neighbor Market

In February, Feeding the Valley launched the Neighbor Market, a food pantry open during evening hours for working families. This dignified approach increases access to healthy food while providing the flexibility working parents need. As one participant shared: "Everything seems to be creeping up in cost faster than my salary, and it is getting harder to afford good food and eat healthy." We are proud to offer this service to neighbors who are working hard but still struggling to make ends meet.

Answering the Call: Community Hunger Relief Fund

Last fall, we launched the Community Hunger Relief Fund to meet the increased need brought on by the government shutdown. This targeted effort expanded food access and strengthened our hunger relief programs. Thank you to the



hundreds of donors who responded with such generosity and compassion!

The Power of Our Volunteers

We recently celebrated our outstanding volunteers, and the numbers speak for themselves: last year, we recorded 71,050 hours of volunteer service—the equivalent of 34 full-time employees. We simply could not serve our neighbors effectively without the thousands of volunteers who give of their time so selflessly. Thank you for everything you do!



Good health starts with what's on our plates, yet for many neighbors in our community, rising food costs mean healthy ingredients are tough to afford. Too often, families are forced to choose cheaper, less nutritious options, choices that can affect both physical and mental well-being.

Right now, 1 in 7 people across Georgia are facing hunger. For children, the crisis is even more severe: 1 in 5 kids don't know where their next meal will come from. Georgia now ranks fourth in the nation for child food insecurity. Hunger isn't a distant problem. It lives in our neighborhoods, our schools, and our communities. That's why your support matters more than ever.

Frank Sheppard
President & CEO



WELCOME TO THE NEIGHBOR MARKET!

Where Hunger Ends and Hope Begins.

Because of caring donors like you, the Neighbor Market offers something special for hardworking families in our community.

Operating during evening hours, the Neighbor Market was designed to serve working families who can't visit a food pantry during the workday. Visitors can schedule an appointment, bring a recent pay stub, and shop after work in a welcoming space that feels like a neighborhood market.

Unlike a traditional pantry, neighbors can shop for themselves, choosing the foods that fit their family's tastes and dietary needs. Families can get the foods that are right for them in a setting



that's welcoming and recreates the experience of shopping at a regular supermarket, restoring dignity and choice. To make shopping easier, the market also includes a kid-friendly area where children can color or work on puzzles while parents shop.

Guests are welcomed by a beautiful mural created by local artist Chris Johnson, a reminder that this place was built by a community that cares.

Because of you, the Neighbor Market is more than a pantry. It's a place of dignity, hope, and opportunity for working families.



DID YOU KNOW?

FOOD BANKS are the backbone of the hunger relief system, ensuring a steady supply of food to smaller, community-based food pantries. **FOOD PANTRIES** are the critical frontline service points that directly assist individuals and families facing food insecurity. Both are part of a comprehensive network working tirelessly to combat hunger in our communities.

FOOD BANKS

Typically operates at the regional level, serving numerous local pantries and other organizations.



OPERATION:

Operates at the community level, often run by churches, non-profits, or community organizations.

Receives donations from food manufacturers, retailers, farmers, and community food drives.



SOURCE OF FOOD:

Receives food from food banks, local donations, and community food drives.

Equipped with large warehouses capable of storing vast amounts of food, including refrigerated and frozen items.



STORAGE:

Typically has limited storage space, focusing on distributing food as quickly as possible.

Supplies food to food pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, and other community programs.



DISTRIBUTION:

Offers food directly to clients, often through scheduled pick-up times or appointments.

FOOD PANTRIES

WORKING TOGETHER TO MEET THE NEED

Like many food banks across the country, we are facing a critical food shortage. In truth, we have not fully recovered to the inventory levels we once had before COVID. And while we have continued, faithfully and creatively, to meet the needs of our neighbors over the years, this past year has brought new and deeper challenges.

As government funding has shifted and food donations have decreased, the gap has continued to grow. For the first time in our history, we are purchasing food, drawing not only from our operations budget, but also from our reserve funds, in order to keep food moving to families who

depend on us. Our Partner Agencies are feeling this strain as well, often needing to purchase food they can no longer receive from us.

We are not standing still. We've added a dedicated food sourcing position to help uncover new resources, and we are working closely with our Partner Agencies to provide access to food at wholesale cost whenever possible.

Every member of the Feeding the Valley team feels the weight of this moment. Because while the challenges are real, so is the need. Rising grocery and fuel costs are placing an even greater burden on families, and in the face of less food, the call to serve has never been stronger.

Together, we're all working to meet this moment.

A SOUPER DAY FOR KIDS!

Our annual Empty Bowl event was a souper success this year and continues to grow into one of our community's favorite traditions. With more than 1,500 beautiful bowls to choose from, guests enjoyed them with delicious soups, shared laughter with friends, and came together for a wonderful cause.

Every bowl served was a reminder of what our community can do when hearts come together. Because of this incredible support, our Kids Café Program continues to grow—now serving children from Columbus and Phenix City to Albany, and most recently, Troup County.

What started as a simple bowl of soup has become something much bigger: a community promise to care for our kids. Ensuring that children receive the nourishment they need to learn, grow, and thrive is at the very heart of our mission.

Thank you to our wonderful sponsors, soup donors, and volunteers for helping make it such a meaningful and souper day for the children we serve.



LOOKING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Visit our website at 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.

