



Full Plate PRESS

THE NEWSLETTER OF
**FEEDING
AMERICA**
West Michigan

Take Action

In West Michigan and the Upper Peninsula, 1 in 8 people faces hunger, including nearly 70,000 children. Help your neighbors in need by getting involved with Feeding America West Michigan.



DONATE:
\$10 = 40 MEALS



VOLUNTEER:
In one hour, you can help us distribute up to 200 meals.



ADVOCATE:
Have a way with words? Help spread our mission by letting people in your community know about our services.



FUNDRAISE:
Your creative spirit can put meals on neighbors' plates.

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"Things are slowly getting back on track. We could not have done it without the help of NMU's food pantry."
Read Mary Ann's story on page 4.



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ABOUT US

Feeding America West Michigan gathers and distributes food to relieve hunger and increase food security in West Michigan and the Upper Peninsula. By working with more than 900 local hunger-relief agencies, the food bank is able to distribute an average of 21 million meals' worth of food each year.

Feeding America West Michigan is a member of Feeding America, The United Way and The Food Bank Council of Michigan. The food bank also maintains a 4-star rating from Charity Navigator.



**FEEDING
AMERICA**
West Michigan
864 West River Center Drive NE
Comstock Park, MI 49321
Learn more at FeedWM.org
Call us at 616.784.3250

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U.P. neighbor who faced hunger gives back

Nearly 70 years ago when Annie was just 9, she would wake up early, walk into town — rain, snow or shine — and peel potatoes at local restaurants.

“They would give me a meal and something to take home to my mom,” she said. Annie’s mom was a hardworking waitress, but there often wasn’t much food in the house. She spent her childhood living both in Marquette County with her mom and — when her mom was struggling — in Minnesota with her grandparents.

When she married her husband of 62 years at age 16, Annie again faced hunger. The mines that U.P. residents relied on for work had shut down, so the couple lived off of government surplus commodities such as cheese and canned goods.

The family appreciated these items, especially when they had small children, but Annie recalled, “We could never buy oranges or apples and fresh fruit.”

Now, Annie helps kids and families in need access fresh produce no matter their situation. She runs Feeding America West Michigan Mobile Food Pantries that provide plenty of fresh fruit, vegetables, dairy products and more to Marquette County neighbors.

In the U.P., jobs in mining, construction or tourism are often seasonal, leaving families without income during long winters. Big expenses such as surgeries or car repairs can leave families with difficult choices. COVID-19 has only intensified these challenges.

Before running the Mobile Pantries, Annie volunteered at a local nonprofit, regularly visiting 1,000 homes and connecting neighbors with food, furniture or help with bills. Often, she said, these neighbors preferred to “suffer in silence” than ask for help. She encouraged them to move past this “Yooper pride” and take what they needed — and share any extras with others.

Annie remains friends with many of the neighbors she’d visit and is eager to chat whenever she sees them at a Mobile Pantry. She knows many of the 500+ families who go through the Mobile Pantry line at Ishpeming’s NORTHIRON Church each month.

“They seem to be almost amazed that this program is here for them at such a time when the rest of the country seems so chaotic,” Annie said.

Mobile Pantries exist for neighbors like Scott, a disabled veteran whose wife just had a pacemaker put in. The couple often watches — and cooks for — their five grandchildren while their parents are at work.

“The price of food is going up and with everything going on we’re barricaded in our house just trying to make ends meet,” Scott said.

Mobile Pantries exist for neighbors like Natasha and Karina, friends who used to volunteer at Mobile Pantries in high school but now attend themselves. As young parents, they attend Mobile Pantries to ensure they can make ends meet and that their children have fresh food.

“My husband was laid off ever since we had our baby, but he’s going to be working again next Tuesday,” Natasha said. “At first I was like, ‘I’m sure that there’s people who need this way more than me’ — but you can’t discount your own need.”

Mobile Pantries exist for neighbors like Noreen, a senior who not only picks up food for her own family but also for a single mom who has cancer and no transportation.

“It’s just nice to help,” she said.

Kind neighbors like Annie are quick to do all they can to meet the need, but they don’t do it alone. Marquette Mobile Pantries are made possible by many supporters of the food bank.

For Annie, the biggest reward is when neighbors are excited at the sight of a box filled with fresh produce — something she could only dream of when she was in need.

Feeding America West Michigan is honored to support efforts to end hunger in Marquette County. With the continued generosity of grantors, donors and volunteers, neighbors like the ones served in Ishpeming will no longer have to worry how they’ll fill their fridges. 🍌





“Everybody there is so kind and caring and judgment-free. It was like a safe zone.”

When Mary Ann lost her job, she turned to her school’s food pantry to feed her family

When Mary Ann was laid off last spring, her first thought was her 7-year-old daughter Madison: “How will we be able to provide for everything she needs?” she recalled thinking.

“With bills to pay, feeding our family and pets — I had a slight panic attack,” she shared.

Mary Ann is a student studying Sports Science at Northern Michigan University. Like many students, she had faced financial difficulties in the past, but never to this extent. Then, she remembered that NMU has a food pantry, where any student in need can shop the shelves for essentials.

Finding help and hope at the pantry

“Everybody there is so kind and caring and judgment-free. It was like a safe zone,” Mary Ann shared. “They were always super helpful and

made our experiences lovely.”

Haley, the college’s assistant dean of students, runs the pantry and does all she can for the students she serves. Haley and the pantry’s volunteers always try to include something fun in Mary Ann’s groceries for Madison — like toys, Star Wars chicken noodle soup or mac n cheese in fun shapes.

“It was a treat to see Mary Ann and her daughter unload their box into their backpacks and discover the special items that we had on the shelves,” Haley said.

One day, Mary Ann’s car broke down, so she biked to the pantry, planning to carry the food home with her. Realizing how difficult that task was, Haley began delivering food to the family instead.

Throughout the pandemic, the family stayed



afloat thanks to Mary Ann’s husband’s job, unemployment income and help from the pantry.

“We have all learned to slow down and enjoy each and every minute together,” Mary Ann shared. “We could not have done it without the help of NMU’s food pantry.”

Students commonly face trade-offs to get an education

Mary Ann has a background in personal training and massage therapy, but recently chose to act on a longtime dream — and invest in her family’s future — by finishing up her degree. She has just three classes left and is considering grad school. Madison has often attended college classes with Mary Ann for one reason or another, and is learning so much from the professors!

Even during normal times, it’s common for students to struggle. In 2017, NMU surveyed students and found that 40 percent had gone hungry because they couldn’t afford food. In response, they opened a food pantry and stock their shelves in large part with food from Feeding America West Michigan.

Students often find ways to balance everything, but sometimes an illness happens, a car breaks down or a student teaching requirement gets in the way of employment, causing money to run out. In these times of crisis, students must choose where to allocate their funds. Often, food is the easiest expense to cut out.

Using the pantry — according to a survey the college conducted this year — helps students reduce anxiety, prioritize other financial obligations, stay continuously enrolled and realize they aren’t alone.

“There are so many students who are working like crazy to change their circumstances and get out of poverty. Getting a college education is one of their steps along the way,” Haley said. “I love hearing students talk about how when they are out of their current circumstances and are able to give back, that they’ll support food pantries.”

The food bank is proud to support the efforts of NMU to end hunger at their school. We hope that, one day, students like Mary Ann across our service area can focus on making their dreams come true — instead of worrying about food. 🍌

Diverse faith communities come together to provide 400,000 meals for U.P. neighbors



In 2019, the Episcopal Diocese of Northern Michigan received a grant toward their member churches’ hunger-relief efforts in the Upper Peninsula. Wanting to increase that grant’s impact, diocese leaders asked church attendees to match the amount. They quickly stepped up to help, raising a total of \$10,000 for neighbors in need.

Mary, a diocese leader, remembered wondering what could happen if — instead of just Episcopalians — they got multiple U.P. faith communities involved in the fight against hunger.

That’s why, in 2020, Mary and Bishop Rayford invited U.P. leaders from the Jewish, Unitarian, Methodist, Lutheran and Catholic communities to join together to raise funds for Feeding America West Michigan.

First, the faith leaders sought grants to create a pool of matching funds they could then challenge

faith community members to meet. Originally, they hoped for a \$20,000 match, but ended up with \$50,000 — thanks to many U.P. organizations, including the Superior Health Foundation, a dedicated supporter of Feeding America West Michigan.

Many faith community members accepted the challenge to meet the match, and raised \$100,000 total — enough for the food bank to provide 400,000 meals’ worth of nutritious food to U.P. neighbors struggling with hunger.

The U.P.’s rurality makes it the perfect residence for neighbors who love independence, but it also means fewer jobs and greater distance between amenities.

“It’s difficult for people to even get to fresh food on a regular basis,” Mary said. That’s partially why the diocese chose to support the food bank in

our efforts to feed neighbors.

“One of the things we really appreciate about [the food bank] is that they get that about us and understand the challenges,” she said.

To meet the intense need found in their communities, many churches in the Episcopal Diocese run their own food pantries. Rayford shared how he was surprised the first time he realized it’s not just neighbors outside their church doors who attend these food pantries, but also those sitting in the pews.

“A lot of people, especially the elderly, are like, ‘do I get my medication, or do I get food?’” Rayford said.

Bishop Katherine of the U.P.’s Lutheran synod, was eager to get her faith community on board as well.

“When so much is going wrong in the world, this is something we can do,” she said. “There’s a lot of complicated issues out there, but at the very least we are called to feed the hungry.”

The food bank is grateful that community members of diverse backgrounds join us in our belief that hunger is unacceptable.

“I think it is about taking care of each other,” Mary said. “One of the faith leaders said, ‘We may have disagreements about theology, but here’s something we can come together and agree on.’”

The efforts of committed faith communities, and the foundations and individuals that support them, will enable the food bank to continue serving thousands of neighbors in need in the U.P. until everyone’s plates are full. 🍌

Food bank pilots Senior Box program to fill senior neighbors’ shelves

Seniors who are food insecure — which means they can’t access or afford enough healthy food — are at a greater risk for the detrimental health effects hunger can cause. In fact, families served by the Feeding America network that include a member over 50 are far more likely to also include someone with high blood pressure and diabetes — conditions that can be mitigated by healthy food.

That’s why we’re piloting a Senior Box program in Kent and Ottawa counties starting this winter. The program will target specific senior populations in these counties, and provide them with bimonthly boxes filled with low-sugar and low-sodium groceries such as grains and canned vegetables, fruits and meats. The boxes will also include recipes and info about other resources for at-risk seniors.

“The goal is to include items that are simple to cook and can be used in multiple different recipes to cater to seniors’ needs,” said Abby, our programs specialist. “We want these boxes to be both practical and tasty.”

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Food for the boxes will be sourced by the food bank and packed by staff and volunteers. These boxes — around 200 per month to start — will then be delivered to designated agency partners who run senior-focused programs in Kent and Ottawa counties, where volunteers will ensure seniors in need receive them.

For older Michiganders at greater risk of disease, consistent access to nutrient-dense food is vital — ultimately helping them avoid costly hospitalizations and nursing home placements. 🍌