

# Full Plate Press

Feeding America West Michigan Food Bank

Winter 2010-2011

A quarterly publication of Feeding America West Michigan Food Bank which includes the Western Upper Peninsula Food Bank, Houghton; Feeding America West Michigan Food Bank, Ishpeming; Feeding America West Michigan Food Bank, Sault Ste. Marie; the Manna Project, Petoskey; Feeding America West Michigan Food Bank, Cadillac; Feeding America West Michigan Food Bank, Grand Rapids; and Feeding America West Michigan Food Bank, Benton Harbor.

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## ON TRADITIONS AND TRANSITIONS

By Jeffrey Battershall, Board President

*Editorial Note: On December 31, Executive Director John Arnold will retire after 21 years of leading Feeding America West Michigan Food Bank. Board of Directors President Jeffrey Battershall shares his thoughts on what the change will mean to our Food Bank.*

For nine years, it has been my privilege to serve on the Food Bank's Board of Directors. For four years, I have been Board President. In both roles, I have been continuously impressed by the incredible volume of food the organization manages to collect and distribute with remarkable cost efficiency.

This year (2010), we expect to hit the 25-million pound mark. That food feeds hundreds of thousands of people through 1,300 food pantries, churches, shelters and other agencies in 40 West Michigan counties. Many of those organizations simply could not afford to feed those in need without food from our Food Bank – which we're able to provide for less than a 10th of what it would cost at a grocery store.

This tradition of remarkable effectiveness is largely due to the determination of John Arnold, who has led our Food Bank as Executive Director for the last 21 years. John has devoted his life to ending hunger and, fortunately for our region, he has been an inventive and untiring champion of the cause. For the past five of those years John has fought not only hunger but also cancer, and now the progression of his cancer has resulted in his deciding to retire at the end of the year.



Jeff Battershall, left, with retiring Executive Director John Arnold

Now that John is retiring, we have an important leadership role to fill. However, in our further good fortune, we also have Teresa Pawl-Knapp, who has stood at John's side and served the Food Bank as Assistant Director for nearly 21 years. A sure and steady second-in-command, Teresa has extensive food banking experience and knows our staff,

operations, customers and supporters well. Teresa has been an important part of our Food Bank's growth and success.

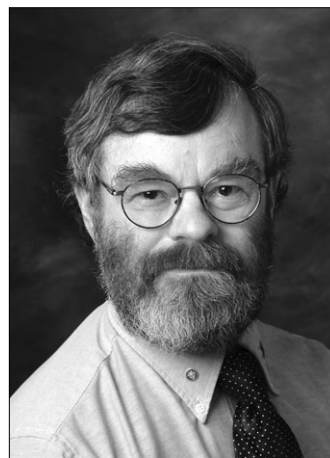
A transition plan is in place to ensure both excellent long-term leadership for the Food Bank and uninterrupted Food Bank services and operations

during the transition period. I'm pleased to announce that Teresa will step in as Interim Executive Director on January 1, 2011, providing leadership and continuity with her extensive experience as the Board conducts a nationwide search for a new Executive Director. This search is in keeping with the demands and stature of one of the nation's largest food banks in one of its most economically challenged regions.

I am deeply grateful to Teresa, as we all should be, for her willingness to stay at the forefront during and beyond this transitional period – as I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to have worked with John Arnold on such a uniquely important cause.

I am certain that, with the dedicated work of our staff and continued support from our customers and communities, hunger will gain no ground in West Michigan, and the Food Bank will continue to successfully fulfill its critical mission of feeding those in need.

## FROM THE DESK OF JOHN ARNOLD



*So long!...It's been good t'know you! As many friends of the Food Bank know, in addition to fighting hunger I've been in a personal fight with cancer for a number of years. Nearly five years to be exact. While there is a cure for hunger (food!), there presently isn't a cure for the sort of cancer I have. It can only be slowed down as it relentlessly progresses. Both the progression of the cancer and the medicines and treatments used to slow it down contribute to what eventually adds up to mind-numbing fatigue. And*

*that is the point I have finally reached.*

*So, shortly after our last newsletter was mailed out I notified the Board and staff here at the Food Bank that I will be retiring as of the end of the day on December 31.*

*I've been directing food banks for 28 years, here in my home town for nearly 22 of those. Altogether I've been able to help secure and distribute a little over 300 million pounds of food aid across West Michigan. Whenever anyone comments on what a bum deal it is that I got cancer, what immediately eclipses that in my mind is how incredibly lucky I have been to be able to be here and to do this work.*

*Of particular pride is our daring to add the Upper Peninsula to our service area and developing a branch warehouse model for serving it that ended up being widely copied around the U.S. in extending services to other remote rural areas; developing/recruiting more than 1,300 outlets for our food to ensure that every person*

*in our 40-county service area genuinely has reasonable access to food aid should they need it; our Waste Not Want Not research with Michigan State University that determined what it takes to end hunger in America (See "Charity Food Programs That Can End Hunger In America" on the "Resources" page of our web site!); the collections I assembled of what the world's major religious faiths teach about dealing with hunger and with people who need help (also available on our website) and last but not least, our pioneering the concept of mobile food pantries.*

*Our food bank isn't the largest food bank in the U.S., but I venture to guess we are the most copied. Our work on the above and on letting clients pick out their own food, on how food banks can find food where no one thinks there is any, on why food censorship is wrong, on why food banks should be wary of mission creep, on why fund drives are so superior to food drives, on why food purchasing is a bad idea, on how there is a better way to provide help to the needy in the holiday season than traditional holiday baskets, etc. have sent ripples benefitting hungry people all over not just the U.S. but around the world. So how can I not smile and feel lucky?*

*Thank you everyone who has helped us by volunteering, by contributing food, money, time, expertise, advice, equipment, supplies, services. . . . .so many people to thank. . . . .so many who have helped in so many ways. Again, I loop around to how lucky I have been to know you, and to have been able to translate your help into food for people who need it.*

*We can end hunger! In some of our counties we've already done it. Please continue your support of the Food Bank as it pursues reaching that same level everywhere else, making the dream of a hunger-free West Michigan at long last into a dream come true. I may not be here, but I'll be watching . . . and smiling.*

## John Arnold's 21+ years at West Michigan's Food Bank

**1989:** In mid-June John became the Executive Director of West Michigan Gleaners, Inc. and immediately: began mailing weekly "food available" updates to its agencies, added the Upper Peninsula to its service area and "Food Bank" to its name. The Western U.P. Food Bank opened in Hancock. The Food Bank distributed over 500,000 pounds in a month for the first time. Distribution increased from 3.2 million pounds in 1988 to 4.9 million pounds.

**1990:** The Food Bank ceded a total of ten counties - three to the Red Cross Food Bank in Lansing, and seven to the Food Bank of South Central Michigan in Battle Creek. The Food Bank's name was changed again, to: "Second Harvest Gleaners Food Bank of West Michigan, Inc." The Central U.P. Food Bank opened in Ishpeming and North West Gleaners Food Bank opened in Cadillac. Distribution increased to 7.0 million pounds.

**1991:** The Food Bank purchased, renovated, and moved into a new facility on Front Avenue in Grand Rapids.

**1992:** The Food Bank leased its first tractor-trailer. The Eastern U.P. Food Bank opened in Sault Ste. Marie and South West Gleaners Food Bank opened in St. Joseph.

**1993:** Spartan Stores began making daily product donations to the Food Bank, becoming the first company to donate a million pounds in a single year. The Heart of West Michigan United Way identified hunger as West Michigan's worst unmet need, setting in motion what became the international award-winning Waste Not Want Not Project. Distribution increased to 8.5 million pounds.

**1994:** The Waste Not Want Not Project was launched as a collaborative research partnership of the Food Bank and Michigan State University to determine how communities in America can adequately address their hunger problem. The Food Bank distributed its 50 millionth pound.

**1995:** The Waste Not Want Not Project succeeded in achieving its goal! The Food Bank distributed over 1 million pounds in a month for the first time.

*Continue to page 3*

**1996:** Promotion of the Waste Not Want Not Project's findings and recommendations began. The Food Bank distributed over 10 million pounds in a year for the first time.

**1997:** John assembled the eight "Scripture collections." 109 chest freezers were distributed to agencies. Distribution increased to 11.5 million pounds.

**1998:** The Food Bank pioneered the mobile food pantry concept/system with two used tractors and three used trailers. Distribution increased to 12.8 million pounds.

**1999:** Mobile pantries distributed 2.2 million pounds of product in 441 distributions. The Food Bank distributed its 100 millionth pound of product, and completely outgrew its Front Avenue warehouse. Distribution increased to 14.2 million pounds. The search began for a larger warehouse one month after the Front Avenue mortgage was paid off.

**2000:** The Food Bank purchased 10 acres in Comstock Park with an 11,000-square-foot building on it, added 44,000 square feet of warehouse space to it, and moved into its new home in a November blizzard! 1,000th mobile pantry distribution.

**2001:** The Food Bank hosted a 20th Anniversary Open House at its new warehouse. A volunteer (Jeff Thomas) created the first national food bank directory and location map. The mobile pantry fleet grew to five trucks. Distribution increased to 15.8 million pounds.

**2002:** The Food Bank's mobile food pantry trucks distributed their 10 millionth pound; the Food Bank distributed its 150 millionth pound.

**2003:** Kent County installed a stop light at West River Drive/West River Center Drive, adding years to the life expectancy of the Food Bank's staff and customers! We set a goal of increasing our distribution by 15% per year hereafter until all needs are met.

**2004:** Mobile pantries distributed 5 million pounds during the year. The Solid Waste Association of North America recommended John visit a landfill in Florida that had pioneered what he turned into "The Landfill Project" concept for food banks.

**2005:** The mobile pantries distributed their 25 millionth pound of goods; the Food Bank distributed its 200 millionth pound; its distribution for the year rose to 18.9 million pounds.

**2006:** The Fremont Area Community Foundation decides to promote the use of Waste Not Want Not methods and mobile food pantry services in Newaygo County; the county achieved "hunger-free" status in four months! The Greater Ottawa County United Way also promoted those practices and the Food Bank's distribution there nearly doubled. The Food Bank distributed 2 million pounds in a month for the first time ever. John was diagnosed with advanced, inoperable cancer.

**2007:** North West Gleaners Food Bank moved into its permanent 20,000-square-foot home. The mobile pantries distributed over 7 million pounds; the Food Bank's distribution increased to 20.3 million pounds for the year, and to over 250 million pounds since 1981.

**2008:** Bowing to demand, the Food Bank launched a modest product purchase program. Agency product ordering went on-line. The "\$10 of store-purchased food vs. \$10 of Food Bank food" poster was created and widely circulated. The Food Bank created an Endowment named after John, and hosted its first-ever Gala to raise funds for it.

**2009:** The Food Bank experienced the largest single-year increase in its distribution, distributing 24.5 million pounds for the year, in part via 1,172 mobile pantry distributions. After America's Second Harvest became "Feeding America," and our Food Bank became "Feeding America West Michigan Food Bank." John was awarded Feeding America's highest honor, being named a "John van Hengel [the Founder of food banking] Fellow."

**2010:** The Food Bank distributed its 300 millionth pound in February, and hosted its second John Arnold Endowment Gala. Website and web presence were upgraded. The St. Joseph Branch moved to a 20,000-square-foot building in Benton Harbor Township. John's cancer's progression finally demands that he retire, which he will do on December 31.

## Middle schoolers learn to make a difference

On Wednesday, October 6, a group of 10 sixth-graders from Ada Christian Middle School came to our main warehouse to volunteer with food processing.

As Volunteer Coordinator Dena Rogers recalls, "I asked the kids if they knew anything about Feeding America and one of the little girls replied, 'Yes, my dad is the President!' That certainly got my attention!"

After a few probing questions, Dena says, "I realized the girl's father was Jeff Battershall, our board president. Her mother Stephanie, one of the group's two chaperones, helped explain how the Food Bank provides surplus food to hungry families, and explained how raising money helps provide many times more food than traditional food drives."

## My Mentor, Hero and Friend

By Susannah Morgan, Executive Director,  
Food Bank of Alaska

Life is richer and more rewarding with mentors. One of my dearest mentors is John Arnold – who is also my hero and my friend.

John is the father of Client Choice, the philosophy that says that hungry people should be able to choose the food they are given, so that it meets their dietary, cultural, emotional, and culinary needs.

I first met John on a national task force in 2002, and he came to Alaska shortly after that to help us and our partner agencies implement his concept of Client Choice. Today, more than 2/3 of our agencies have implemented the concept, and I can proudly say it's one of Food Bank of Alaska's guiding principles..

One of our agency representatives who was inspired by John's concept was my good friend Carol Warren of Lutheran Social Services of Alaska. Sadly, she passed away in 2007. About three days before she died, I got to see her and ask if there was anything she had left undone that I could help with. And without missing a beat, she said, "Yes! Client choice! Why should anyone have to eat green beans when they would rather have corn?" Today, we give an annual award in her name to the Alaska agency that best exemplifies the principles of Client Choice – which Carol championed and John brought to us.

John is also the father of the Mobile Food Pantry, which Food Bank of Alaska implemented four years ago. One of the great assets of the mobile food pantry is that it allows you to distribute highly perishable and highly nutritious food, such as fresh produce, very quickly. That has meant a lot to our hungry neighbors in Anchorage, who now receive almost 1 million pounds of food each year through our mobile food pantry. However, in much of Alaska, the population is scattered, and most of the state is not connected by roads. So now I'm dreaming about obtaining and operating the first flying mobile food pantry – and the plane's name will have to be 'The Arnold Express'!

John has always questioned the status quo, and this has kept our national organization Feeding America "on its toes" in many other ways over the years. For example, once we all assumed that larger food banks were more efficient than small ones in distributing food. But John took the initiative to find out. He did a nationwide study of cost-per-pound of food distributed at all food banks – and proved that there was no correlation between cost and the size of the food bank, or between urban and rural food banks. Our assumptions were wrong – and it took John to lead us to the truth.

John is also astoundingly good at always keeping the end goal in mind – providing food to our hungry neighbors. Food banks nationwide used to measure our effectiveness



simply by the amount of food we distributed. John taught me that that effectiveness is really about the people who need food: Are we getting them the food that they need?

I will always remember John pulling the hasp of a padlock out of his pocket while he was here in Alaska. John told me it came from a dumpster behind a food bank, where the expired food was thrown away. Now you know, when a food bank throws food away, it's gone bad! But someone was so desperate for food, they came to that dumpster one night and cut the lock in half to get that old food. That half-a-padlock reminds John why our work is so important. And the fact that John carries it with him always as a talisman brings tears to my eyes – and helps explain why he is my hero.

I don't know if my words can ever honor John as he deserves. But of course, the best way to honor John is to work tirelessly to feed hungry people, just as he has done for decades. So here at Food Bank of Alaska, we honor John everyday by carrying on his work.

## "BAD BOYS" DO GOOD BY FEEDING GRAND RAPIDS FAMILIES

On the evening of September 30, Detroit Pistons "bad boys" Rick Mahorn and John Long came to Grand Rapids to help distribute more than 7,500 pounds food to 100 families in need.

The bad boys joined good folks from LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church at the Feeding America West Michigan mobile pantry distribution held at Grand Rapids'



Congress Elementary School.

Funds for the food came from the third annual Pistons Care Telethon, a 17-hour event highlighted by the telecast of the team's game on March 2 at The Palace. Telethon proceeds are being used to deliver over 1.5 million meals to families, children, seniors and the homeless across Michigan from June through December.

## Food Distribution

A poem by Reverend Mark Nelesen

White manna truck lumbers in...  
weighed down with a heavy glory  
a grace-dispenser  
with rusted edges and  
rattley diesel.

Tables stand ready  
eager hearts and hands  
equally gloried and graced  
ready for well-used pallets  
and the smell of damp cardboard  
waiting for the wondrous surprise  
that lies behind a shuttered door.  
We stand with faces aglow  
ready to lift  
hold  
and then release again.

We are a resistance group  
pushing back  
in a grace revolution  
for those overwrought  
by life  
and circumstances...  
in other words,  
all of us.  
we discover again  
we are bound together  
by common dust and breath

generosity is a small serum  
for those who dispense  
and those who receive  
each has been overcome  
taken advantage of  
and buckled under imposed burden

a heavy truck  
takes on a weighty neighborhood  
and humanity happens  
through glad smiles and open hands  
buying back stolen dignity;  
each of us needs what is offered there

thank yous are spoken  
we divide the bread  
and share it;  
when we do  
we recognize that all this seems oddly familiar  
we've been here before  
this is food for the day  
that lasts without toil or spoil  
arms stretch out  
carry the weight of the neighborhood  
the weight of humanity  
the weight of the world  
and in such sharing  
we are never the same.

## THE PATH AHEAD

By Teresa Pawl-Knapp, Assistant Director

Editorial note: On December 31, 2010, Teresa will officially assume the role of Interim Director when Executive Director John Arnold retires.

One of my favorite quotations is, "The thing to do is to turn your everyday life—relationships, social involvement and work—into your spiritual path. Everything we do, if it can be done with sufficient awareness, can be transformed."

These words are by the Tibetan Buddhist nun Tenzin Palmo. They also capture the philosophy I perceive in John Arnold – a philosophy we both share.

John Arnold and I have worked together here at the Food Bank for 20 years. But we met each other in 1973, when I recruited him along with other Vietnam veterans to the William James Honors Program at Grand Valley State. That's where we both studied various philosophies of how to make the world a better place.

In 1990, it was John's turn to recruit me. I was working as a graphic designer, but I had also become a passionate advocate for neighborhood revitalization, which had taught me a lot about poverty in our community. When John called, I was chairing the Grand Rapids Board of Recreation, developing a Parks and Recreation master plan and chairing the Grand Rapids Community Development Block Grant committee dispensing \$6 million in grants.

John asked me to join our Food Bank, which was then called Second Harvest Gleaners of West Michigan. From our student days, I knew John and I shared philosophies. For example, we both believe it's vital to empower the people we serve to make good choices for their families – rather than taking the "we know best" approach. It sounds simple, but at the time it was an unconventional concept.

Today, our Food Bank is among the top10% in the Feeding America network. We distribute 25 million pounds of food per year – feeding families and starving landfills. We identified geographic gaps in food assistance, and set up new agencies and sent out mobile pantries to close those gaps. Instead of handing out standardized boxes of whatever cans are on hand, we empower 100,000 families in 40 counties to choose food they can use.

Looking back over 20 years working with John, I can't quite believe what we've managed to accomplish – or how fast time has gone by. Our entire team has been energized by creative solutions, persistence, and the kind of synergy that can rise to any challenge.

Following John's passionate example, we're harder-working, more hopeful and more innovative because of him. We have seen things change for the better. We have won battles that seemed unwinnable. And we're not going to stop.







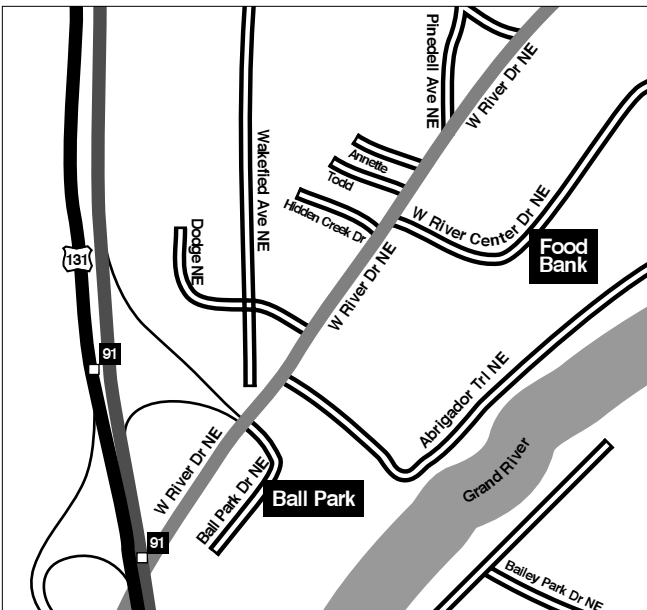
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**VISITING THE FOOD BANK?  
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Take U.S. 131 to exit 91 (Comstock Park/West River Drive). Turn left on West River Drive. Turn right at the stoplight at West River Center Drive (Wendy's on corner). Our address is 864 West River Center Dr., Comstock Park, MI 49321-8955 Questions? Call us at 616.784.3250



*Feeding America West Michigan Food Bank is a non-profit surplus food warehouse distributing about 2 million pounds of food monthly in cooperation with 1,300 charitable agencies. The food we handle helps needy families, the unemployed, senior citizens, at-risk children, pregnant teens, domestic violence victims, AIDS patients and others at risk of hunger in our difficult economy. Ultimately, our food aids an estimated 100,000 West Michigan and Upper Peninsula families annually. Call us at 616-784-3250 or learn more at [www.FeedingAmericaWestMichigan.org](http://www.FeedingAmericaWestMichigan.org).*

Feeding America West Michigan Food Bank is a member of Feeding America – The Nation's Food Bank Network, The United Way, and The Food Bank Council of Michigan.

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