

of mouth word

our region's stand against hunger begins here.



in
this
issue

**Impacting
Lives**
page 2

#MEFAPMatters
page 3

**Recipe to
End Hunger**
page 5



E-NEWS

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The Task Force to End Hunger holds its first meeting

One of the many symptoms of poverty in our country, hunger is an epidemic of our time. The need for emergency food to feed our neighbors in need continues to increase year after year. In our last fiscal year, The Food Bank distributed nearly 10 million pounds of food — the most ever. It's more apparent that food banking alone will not bring an end to hunger. It will take sustainable, long-term systemic change to ensure that everyone has access to healthy food.

On January 19, The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts took a big step toward real change, as we hosted the first meeting of the Task Force to End Hunger. Developed as part of The Food Bank's strategic plan in 2013, the Task Force brings together a group of thought leaders from all four counties of Western Massachusetts, representing diverse sectors of the community. Policy makers, business leaders, education professionals, health care administrators, religious leaders and others have begun a serious discussion about hunger, its causes and solutions.

Over the course of the year, the Task Force will meet regularly to develop a bold, yet pragmatic, plan of action to

continued on page 4

Pictured above: Representatives from diverse sectors of the community gathered at The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts for the first in a series of meetings of the Task Force to End Hunger.



Andrew Morehouse
Executive Director

Dear Friends,

Last year, The Food Bank distributed approximately 10 million pounds of food — the equivalent of 8.2 million meals — the most ever in our 33-year existence. This food reached more than 211,000 of our neighbors in need through our Mobile Food Bank and Brown Bag: Food for Elders programs as well as our 200 partner local feeding programs in the four counties of Western Massachusetts.

“As we move such large quantities of food through our warehouse, it’s often easy to overlook the impact that a single bag of groceries can have on someone’s life.”

As we move such large quantities of food through our warehouse, it’s often easy to overlook the impact that a single bag of groceries can have on someone’s life. I was reminded of this by a manager at one of our partner food pantries in Springfield. He told me a recent story about arriving at the food pantry one morning at 6 a.m. to find a man asleep at the front door. The man had just finished working the 3rd shift and had stopped by the pantry to get some food before heading home. He was extremely thankful for the groceries as he explained that he was working long hours to put his wife through college. This real person, with a beating heart and a desire to succeed in life, recently earned his commercial driver’s license, enabling him to get a better paying job. He no longer needs food from the pantry and, in fact, he now volunteers at that pantry out of gratitude for the help he received when he needed it most.

Our partners in the emergency food network, such as this food pantry, play a crucial role in assisting food insecure families and individuals through tough times in their lives. From meal sites and shelters, to childcare facilities and elderly living facilities, each of our local partners has its own unique impact on the lives of the people they serve. You, too, are our local partners by giving of your time, talent and/or treasure. Together, we CAN ensure that everyone has access to healthy food, regardless of their circumstances. ●

The mission of The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts is to feed our neighbors in need and lead the community to end hunger.

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Increased MEFAP funding can provide additional 3 million meals

The Food Bank leads the community in advocating for necessary public investment to feed our neighbors in need.

This spring, we are asking state policy makers for a \$3M increase to the Massachusetts Emergency Food Assistance Program (MEFAP). The program provides funds to the four regional food banks in the Commonwealth to purchase nutritious staples, such as meat, eggs, milk and fresh produce (many from Massachusetts food companies and farmers). The four food banks then distribute it through a statewide network of more than 800 local emergency food providers, reaching hundreds of thousands of people statewide in need of food assistance. Approximately 37% of people in need do not qualify for other government benefits, and rely heavily on food pantries, soup kitchens and shelters to help feed their families in any given week or month of the year.

By increasing MEFAP from \$17 million to \$20 million, these four food banks will be able to provide an additional 3 million healthy meals statewide.

To help us advocate for more food for hungry households, visit our website and sign up for our Advocacy Action Alerts (foodbankwma.org/get-involved/advocate). Stay up to date on government actions and policies, as well as actions you can take to support our efforts. We'll send an Action Alert when your voice is needed to weigh in on a piece of legislation.

You can also help make a difference in the community by sharing your experience with food insecurity, or that of someone you know. We'll share these stories with our state legislators throughout the year. You can keep the conversation going on social media, by using the hashtag #MEFAPMatters, and letting our legislators know the impact MEFAP has on the lives of real people in our communities.

By working together and lending your voice, you can help bring about positive change. ●



State Representative Aaron Vega (left) met with Food Bank member agencies last year to talk about why #MEFAPMatters to his constituents in Holyoke.

Closing the SNAP Gap

Currently, approximately 785,000 Massachusetts residents receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, including working families with children, seniors, veterans and the disabled. Despite this increasingly high number, there are still thousands more individuals in need of this benefit who aren't enrolled in the program.

Approximately 80% – 90% of MassHealth recipients are likely eligible for SNAP, yet only 41% of them currently receive the benefit. By closing this gap, not only would thousands of people receive SNAP benefits to purchase healthy food, but as much as an additional \$73 million per month of federal dollars would be spent in the Commonwealth, stimulating more income and job growth.

The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts is working with other regional food banks in Massachusetts, as well as the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute, to advocate for a single application portal for state safety net benefits, including both SNAP and MassHealth. This would make it possible for residents to apply more easily for both programs at the same time, assisting them to purchase healthy food.

Take Heart Against Hunger

This Valentine's Day, we asked everyone, "What's in Your Heart?" This special day of caring is our way of letting people in our lives know exactly how much they mean to us.

Here in Western Massachusetts, hunger is an invisible epidemic experienced by more than 211,000 people on any given day. The face of hunger in our region is the person who goes to work every day, the senior choosing between paying for medication or food, and the child who may go to bed hungry tonight.

Even though Valentine's Day is behind us on the calendar, you can continue to *Take Heart Against Hunger* and share your love through a simple act of generosity. Visit our website at www.foodbankwma.org to make a donation and support our mission. Every dollar provides three meals to someone struggling with food insecurity.

We thank you for giving a little of yourself, your time, and your heart. ●



Task Force

continued from page 1

end hunger in our region. By leveraging our collective regional energy, ingenuity and resources, the Task Force will begin to create ideas and recommendations that will serve as a road map to bring about substantial change.

There will also be a series of community forums (one in each of the counties of Western Massachusetts) scheduled throughout the year. These forums will provide an opportunity for everyone to hear about the progress of the Task Force, and voice their opinions and recommendations. The dates and locations for the forums will be announced soon.

To stay up to date with all future developments, visit the 'Special Initiatives' section of our web site (www.foodbankwma.org), and follow The Food Bank on Facebook and Twitter. ●

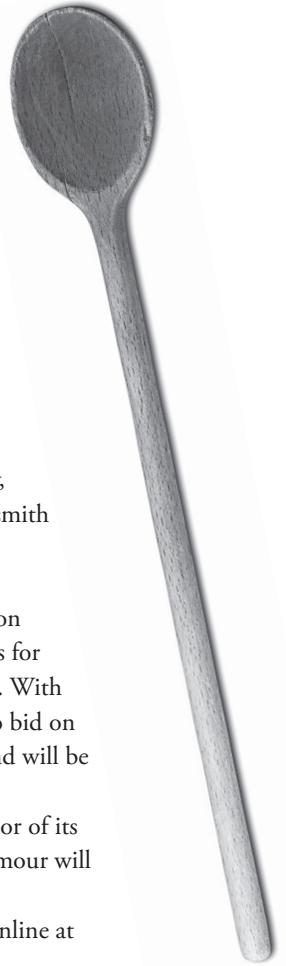
Monte Belmonte walks the walk



For the sixth straight year, 93.9 The River's radio Host Monte Belmonte rallied his listeners, engaged the community, and brought issues of hunger to the forefront with his annual Monte's March event. On Monday, November 23, he and others walked 17 miles from St. John's Congregational Church in Springfield's Mason Square neighborhood to the WRSI studio in Northampton. The following day, they began in downtown Northampton and walked 26 miles to Greenfield. By the end of the second day, Monte raised more than \$150,000 to support The Food Bank. Since his first march in 2010, his event has provided more than 1.1 million meals to our neighbors in need throughout Western Massachusetts.

A Recipe to End Hunger

Friday, April 29, 2016



Pull out your penny loafers and poodle skirts, and help us feed our neighbors in need. You won't want to miss this fun, 1950s-themed evening of food, fun and surprises to benefit The Food Bank. On Friday, April 29, we'll be hosting our friend- and fund-raising event at The Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame in Springfield. And you're invited!

Formerly our biennial Gala, this event will feature top chefs from restaurants around the four counties, including Chandlers, The Red Lion and The Alvah Stone. They'll be preparing some of their favorite recipes for our guests. In addition, there will also be beer, wine and spirits tastings. With live and silent auctions happening all evening, you'll have the chance to bid on some amazing prizes. For your entertainment, The Flyod Patterson Band will be performing live as we open up the dance floor for everyone to enjoy.

In recognition of Big Y's commitment to the community and in honor of its 80th Anniversary, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Donald D'Amour will serve as honorary chairman of the event.

Sponsorships are still available, and you can purchase tickets securely online at www.foodbankwma.org, or by calling 413-247-9738. ●

Registration now open for Will Bike 4 Food

Mark your calendars now for Sunday, September 25, 2016, and join us for our 6th annual ride against hunger. Last year was our largest event ever, providing 300,000 meals to feed hungry people. Join us this year and help us provide even more food to our neighbors in need throughout our region. Ride as an individual or form a team. Visit our website for more information: www.willbike4food.org.



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