

Harvest News

A publication of



FOOD BANK OF NORTH ALABAMA

Here's what summer meals look like with the Food Bank of North Alabama:



The Bus Brigade. Our largest site is Central Baptist Church in downtown Decatur. Children from all over Morgan County can take the bus to the church's vacation bible school. The bus is critical in an area with no public transportation. In five days they served 3,702 meals. On one day, they fed 530 children in 20 minutes. Then the kids hopped back on the bus and headed home.



Even Your Grandkids from Georgia... When the mayor of Colony, Donnis Leeth, attended our Child Hunger Summit on March 2, he knew he wanted to host summer meals this year. So when the State Department of Education Specialist explained that with summer meals, it doesn't matter where a child is from, everyone is welcome to eat, Donnis decided that's what he'd do. Now every day he and his team (pictured here) feed 30 kids breakfast and lunch, including his grandkids from Georgia.

Summer Meals Program is Growing!

Summer in Alabama is a time of bounty and a time of severe need. While gardens and farms are flourishing, many families face hunger, driven in part by the loss of access to free and reduced school meals for their children. That's why we teamed up with the Alabama Food Bank Association to provide free meals to children all summer long.

Since we started in 2014, the Summer Meals Program has grown exponentially. When we began in 2014, we had only 4 sites in the Shoals. Last year was our first season of intense expansion: We served 12,000 meals to 1,500 children across 17 summer meal sites. We kept the momentum going, and this summer served over 18,000 meals to 1,900 children across 30 sites. Many of the new sites are entirely new partners for the Food Bank. For the first time, we worked with libraries, town governments and schools to reach children in need during the summer.

Our Summer Meals Program expansion started back in the winter, when Child Hunger Corps Member Laurel Moffat found that of our 11 counties, two were reaching less than 2 percent of children eligible for summer meals. Cullman and Lawrence counties had just one summer meal site in 2016; this year we added 5 sites in Cullman and 8 in Lawrence.

In partnership with the City of Florence, we received a \$20,000 grant from the National League of Cities to combat summer and afterschool hunger across the city. The generous funds and new partnership with Florence helped us expand our sites in the area and increase targeted advertisement for summer meals. We grew from 4 returning sites to 6, reaching 257 children. The grant was funded by Walmart.

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Let's Take a Selfie! After all the planning takes place, summer meals is just good old fun. Sometimes we even get to make friends.



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The Food Bank of North Alabama is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

New Partner Runs Food Program Out of Former Nightclub

After a string of shootings, the Bench Warmer night club on University Drive in Huntsville closed in 2014. Many in the community wondered what would move in next. Located next to Northwoods Public Housing Development, several businesses and community organizations shied away from pursuing the property. Pastor Carlos Aybar with Ministerio Restauracion Internacional was not daunted by the location's rough history or the poor state of the building. He and his congregants had been looking for a new home for their church and believed this building was exactly where they were called to be, near downtown Huntsville in a neighborhood with high need.

The church group purchased the property in 2015, oversaw renovations the following year and hosted their first Sunday service in September 2016. Soon afterward, they approached the Food Bank about starting a food ministry. The church's Food Ministry director, Indy Cano, previously lived in Florence and had been involved with another Food Bank partner, Christ Chapel: Loaves and Fishes. After moving to Huntsville and becoming involved with Ministerio Restauracion Internacional, she encouraged her church to begin feeding hungry people in their community. When asked about her passion for food ministry, Indy said, "Food ministry is important because it is a good way to show the love of God. The Bible says to help those in need. Especially in this country; we have a lot and can help. If we help others, God will take care of us." Indy continued, "We started a food ministry because this is a missionary church. We help feed children in Equatorial Guinea, Venezuela, and the Dominican Republic. If we help people outside the country, we also want to help people here."

The church's food pantry is open two days each week. They feed about 45 families each month, giving each family about 60 pounds of food. "Some of the clients mention they had previously been to the building when it was a night club. They chuckle now, thinking it is a church," added Mrs. Cano. Although the congregation is Spanish-speaking, about 90% of the food pantry clients are native English speakers. According to Mrs. Cano, a majority walk over from the Housing Authority property next door. Some of their clients have even become church volunteers.

The Food Bank of North Alabama is proud to partner with Ministerio Restauracion Internacional, and many other wonderful groups that have launched new programs to feed those in need.



Pumpkin Art Project Brings Community Together



Have you seen a giant starfish made of locally grown pumpkins and gourds? How about a pumpkin cornucopia bursting at the seams and stretching as far as the eye can see? These were some of the elements of last year's Pumpkin Art display at the Huntsville Botanical Garden, and this fall they once again are partnering with the Food Bank's Farm Food Collaborative to bring you this fun and creative new garden tradition.

At the Food Bank of North Alabama, we understand the connection between economic wealth and community health. The more economic vitality we have in a community, the more jobs are available and more taxes paid into the

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system, which leads to fewer hungry people in need of food assistance. Food Bank visionaries established the Farm Food Collaborative in 2012 to help create solutions to end hunger tomorrow while still working hard to feed those who are hungry today. The Collaborative helps local farmers connect with wholesale markets from public schools to grocery stores, and sometimes, other local nonprofits.

One such connection is the sale of locally grown pumpkins to the Huntsville Botanical Garden for their seasonal Pumpkin Art display. As the Director of Horticulture at the Huntsville Botanical Garden and the artist behind these festive works, Niki Sothers says she had "struggled to grow enough

pumpkins for our fall exhibit. With help from the Farm Food Collaborative, we were able to create our first large Pumpkin Art display in 2016, and the exhibit was a huge success. We look forward to working with the Collaborative for our future displays." In fact, she is already teaming up with the Garden's Special Project Coordinator Carol Lambdin to assemble volunteers, prepare the grounds, and brainstorm ideas for showcasing these beautiful pumpkins this fall. The Farm Food Collaborative's Carey Martin and Brooke Adam have been working behind the scenes all year with farmer Jeremy Calvert of J. Calvert Farms to ensure the crop's success. Calvert enjoys growing pumpkins and is "very grateful for the Garden's commitment to local sourcing and the Food Bank's work to support local farms."

This event truly commemorates teamwork and partnership in North Alabama. The Food Bank is all about bringing individuals and groups together to invest in and serve our community as a whole. Please join us in getting out this October to experience inspiring Pumpkin Art creations at the Huntsville Botanical Garden. If you take a picture there, please tag us on Facebook or Instagram so we can celebrate our local community and Alabama's fall harvest with you!



Special Recognition Donations

In Honor of

Trey Barrontine's Birthday
By Nancy Lewis

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By Raymond Webb

Rocket Chef Rocked With Chef Rene

This year's Rocket Chef fundraiser was a great success! In its 4th year, the event benefits both the Food Bank of North Alabama and Merrimack Hall Performing Arts Center. This year's four competing chefs were Rene Boyzo (Church Street Purveyor), Crystal McKone (Old Town Stock House Restaurant), Jakob Reed (Table in the Garden), and Rick Vonk (personal chef). The event is an Iron Chef-style competition, pitting four local chefs against each other during three timed rounds. In each round the chefs must use a unique combination of Mystery Basket ingredients in each dish. In this year's competition, the mystery basket ingredients included items such as Jala Jala salsa and Pizzelle's Confections marshmallows, both which had to be used with a chicken entrée.

Competition for tickets was just as fierce, with Merrimack Hall transforming into a sold-out venue. After a strong performance of both cooking and fundraising, Chef Rene Boyzo of Church Street Purveyor pulled out the win.

The Food Bank is grateful to all the chefs, judges, volunteers, sponsors and attendees who made this event one of our best ever!



Chef Rene Boyzo



SNAP Outreach SNAPshot

"We can help," is something we are privileged to say at the Food Bank of North Alabama, and we get to say it a lot, especially in the SNAP Outreach Program. This program works with partner agencies across our 11-county service area to provide assistance to clients. The SNAP Outreach Team is contracted through the Department of Human Resources to help folks navigate the SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly food stamps) application process. Personal screening and application assistance is offered at pantry distributions, over-the-phone, and by trained agencies and volunteers interested in doing outreach in their community. By helping improve program participation, clients can supplement their grocery budget and put their money toward other necessities like health care, insurance and housing.

For the past two years, the Food Bank of North Alabama has housed a SNAP Outreach Coordinator in collaboration with Feeding the Gulf Coast. Since launching this partnership in September 2015, the program has assisted people in 1,200 households in applying for benefits, also impacting 583 additional residents of those households. These applications have the potential of generating \$4.7 million in SNAP benefits and providing 1.7 million meals for a year.

Judy, a grateful beneficiary who applied a few months ago, shared her experience with us: "First of all, everyone was very nice and made it easy. You answered all my questions. Very informative. Everything went smoothly and quickly for me. And in terms of the benefits, any amount you get helps, especially if you're on a limited budget like me. The card is easy to use. Everyone was just totally nice, real professional. I'd recommend y'all to anybody!"

If you or someone you know is having trouble paying for groceries or making ends meet, please call our SNAP Outreach Program at 256-339-5885. We can help.



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Pampered Chef Round Up from the Heart Campaign

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Would you like to visit our warehouse and learn more about the work of your Food Bank?

Sign up for a tour! It's easy—call (256-382-0296) or email [Laura Fincher at communityrelations@fbfna.org](mailto:Laura.Fincher@fbfna.org). We would love to show you around.