

## CEO's Report: October 2009 Annual Meeting

Hello everyone. I'm Andrew Schiff and I'm so glad to see you all here tonight. Our annual meeting is always such a great opportunity each year to bring together our Member Agencies, Board members and our staff.

For those of you who are here for the first time, welcome and thank you for coming. In particular, I want to welcome Captains Persi San Clemente and Leo San Clemente, who recently moved to Rhode Island to lead the Pawtucket Salvation Army. The Pawtucket Salvation Army just marked their 115<sup>th</sup> year – congratulations on reaching that impressive milestone.

This year, the food pantry at St. Raymond's Church in Providence marked their 80<sup>th</sup> year. Congratulations to Ann Marie Bandieri and everyone at St. Raymond's.

Now, I thought 115 years and 80 years were pretty amazing anniversaries, until Father Frank explained that this month is the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Franciscan Order. That really puts things in perspective. Congratulations.

We are here tonight to conduct some important business. We'll hear a report from our Treasurer, Patti Cerilli, about the finances of the Food Bank. Thanks to a generous outpouring from the entire community last year, the Food Bank is in a strong financial position and we can continue to meet the record demand for food assistance that we're seeing all across the state.

Tonight, we will also elect our Board of Directors and thank those Board members who are completing their terms on the Board. And we'll have a report from Jen Tomassini, our Chief Operating Officer, about our plans for the coming year.

Even though we have a lot of business to attend to, I hope that tonight will also provide the opportunity for you to reflect on all that you have accomplished over the past year. Both what you have accomplished at your own agency, and what we have accomplished collectively as a network.

We've helped so many new clients – people who have never needed food assistance before. As a network, we provided 13 million meals to people in need during the last year. That's 30 percent more than the previous year and reflects both the growing need and your hard work.

At our Member Agencies, staff and volunteers go beyond the call of duty to help those in need every single day. You do this with little public recognition for your work. I know that at times you can feel isolated, alone in this work, carrying the burden by yourself.

One of our supporters described the pressure to meet the constant need for food assistance this way: “it’s like bailing out a boat, over and over, just to keep it from sinking.”

Although I know that it can sometimes feel that way –honestly, I hate that metaphor.

Instead, I prefer to think about what we do as similar to the portable life net that in the past firefighters used to rescue people jumping from a burning building –a literal safety net.

The net doesn’t save anyone if it’s only held by one person. You need a lot of people holding up different sections of the safety net for it to work and to ensure that the burden is shared.

The more people we have holding up the safety net, the larger it can be and we can help more and more people.

I hope that’s how our network feels to you –like a whole community coming together, sharing the responsibility.

And I hope that everyone here tonight feels supported in your work by the Food Bank. I’m very proud of the staff at the Food Bank and their dedication to our mission. I wish that you could meet and get to know everyone on our staff.

Tonight, I’ve asked four of our staff members to speak to you. You probably have not met them before, but you’ll get to know them tonight.

I’ve asked each staff member to speak to you about their experience at the Food Bank and why they do this work. You’ll hear from Kelly Nichols, our Volunteer Manager; Ed Cash, our Transportation Supervisor; Patti Perry who you know from Customer Service; and Farris Maxwell who is our Procurement Coordinator. After they speak to you, I’ll come back to just say a few more words.

Kelly Nichols:

Six years ago I began working at the Food Bank as a temporary receptionist during the busy holiday season when the Food Bank moved from West Warwick to Providence. At the time, I had just received my Master's Degree in Theatre and was moving from temp job to temp job as I looked for acting work. When I arrived at the Food Bank, I realized that this organization was different from all of the other places I had been temping at. At the reception desk, I had daily contact with the Food Bank staff, volunteers, donors and member agencies. It became clear to me, that even though I was just a temp, I was one small member of an enormous network of people dedicated to helping individuals meet a very basic human need. I remember feeling necessary. It was at this time that I realized I didn't want to move on to a different temp job and I was willing to take a hiatus from my acting career because this was where I wanted to work.

In the past six years at the Food Bank, I have moved from department to department taking several different jobs that have become available, which really has helped me to understand how the Food Bank works as a whole. The thing that impresses me the most about the organization is the staff's willingness to constantly re-evaluate and adapt to the changing needs of our clients and our Member Agencies so that we are getting food to those who need it in the most efficient way possible.

Two years ago, I accepted the position of Volunteer Manager, which is my favorite job to date. Those of you who utilize volunteers on a daily basis know that volunteers are vital to the work we do. Each volunteer has a story about why they feel the need to donate their time.

My favorite part of my job is learning these stories. One volunteer told me that although he was never into community service himself; his wife dedicated her life to helping others. When she passed away, he realized that he needed to pick up where she left off and that is why he volunteers at the Food Bank twice a week. In the past year, we have acquired several new volunteers, many of whom have recently lost their jobs and have decided to make a positive impact with their unexpected free time. It never ceases to amaze me how helpful and dedicated volunteers can be.

On an average day, we utilize around 60 volunteers here at the Food Bank for food sorting, office work and special projects. We usually have more volunteers

in the building each day than we do staff. According to the Independent Sector, a volunteer hour is worth \$20.25. In the past year, our volunteers have logged over 31,000 hours, worth \$630,000.00!

The majority of our volunteers works right here in this room, inspecting and sorting food. Each of you work on the front lines and witness the need of the clients we serve on a daily basis but our volunteers rarely get to see where the food ends up after it leaves our building.

In September, we were able to send several of our volunteers to one of our Member Agencies to help distribute produce through the Neighborhood Pantry Express program. The feedback I heard from the volunteers as they described their experience was that they were blown away by the number of people who came through the line. I reminded them that they were only seeing one of the many communities that our Member Agencies serve on a regular basis.

I will close by saying thank you for the work you do. I encourage you to utilize volunteers as much as possible as they can be a fabulous resource for you. In the future, please feel free to contact me if you ever need advice on how to enhance the volunteer program that you currently have or if you need help recruiting folks who are willing and able to help.

Ed Cash:

My name is Ed Cash and I'm the Transportation Supervisor here at the Food Bank. That means when the trucks are on time –that's me and, when the trucks are late. .well, that's me as well.

I came on board a year ago in September 2008. I had spent the previous five years running my own trucking company as an owner operator. However, due to the extremely difficult economy –one that I'm sure we've all felt, my lifelong dream of running my own trucking company came to a screeching halt.

But as one door closes, another door opens; and here I am.

As it happened, one day I was sitting at my dining room table flipping through the Sunday classifieds when I saw an ad for Transportation Supervisor at the Food Bank. I have to admit that my knowledge of the Food Bank at the time was somewhat limited, but my knowledge of the trucking industry was vast.

Being a native Rhode Islander, I was “kinda” surprised that I really didn’t know who or what this Food Bank was, so I started to investigate.

What I found out was that the Food Bank is “people who help people –help the people who need help.” I was intrigued. This sounded like an ideal opportunity for me to become part of a team of men and women whose common goal is to help people in need!

This first year at the Food Bank has been an incredible one. Absolutely non-stop and, at times, full of craziness. I had a learning curve that I had to get through, but with this first year under my belt, I am looking forward to continuing the process of making improvements in the way we service our agencies along with increasing our communications to further develop our dedicated working relationships.

The bottom line is –whenever our agencies need us, we try to be there because we know that you are on the front line serving the people in our communities in need. I am constantly astonished by the incredible dedication and commitment that these folks have. They work tirelessly often with limited resources and yet they keep showing up and even smile, most of the time.

I feel strongly that the Food Bank and the Member Agencies are a dynamic team in the pursuit of ending hunger. That’s the team anyone would want to be part of! That’s the team I am proud to be part of.

Patti Perry:

I have worked at the Food Bank for 8 years. Like many of you, I have mostly worked for non-profit organizations. It is important to me to make a difference in someone’s life and not just take home a paycheck. I am lucky in that my job lets me do a wide range of activities.

I call my office the Velcro office. I am a wandering Nomad. Wherever the Food Bank needs me is where I go. I have worked for Development, Kids Cafe, Community Kitchen, Finance and Operations.

I have filled in for reception and backed up Customer Service. I serve cake at Community Kitchen graduations, count Pantry Express slips and plug in numbers in endless spreadsheets. I’ve helped out with audits, interviewed clients during the Hunger Study and taught CPR to staff and CK students.

One of the most enjoyable parts of my job is that I am never on one task long enough for it to get boring. I jump from project to project. Some days you'll find me conducting a cooking with fresh herbs demo to the Community Kitchen students, doing invitations for a special event and then setting up new files.

I do a LOT of filing and organizing.

I recently just updated all the agency files and that was interesting because as I set up these files I was exposed to the diversity in our agencies. I saw the work they do and how they have grown and developed over the years.

Unfortunately, the need has also grown.

There is nothing fancy or exciting about what I do. Many people would find the work I do boring, however I find it satisfying because I know that what I do enables the agencies and the Food Bank staff to do their greater work.

When someone like Lorraine Burns from St. Teresa's, an agency that serves well over 5,000 people every month, calls me most Mondays to thank me for the produce that they received for the Pantry Express it makes me feel like I am part of the bigger picture.

I know that the Food Bank and the member agencies have made a difference in my life. They have surrounded me with love through 3 operations, the deaths of my mother and of my husband.

It is a caring place to work. And it is your work that gives me the opportunity to do my work. I thank you for that and look forward to working with you in the future.

Farris Maxwell:

I know many of you by face and some of you by name. However, today, who you are or your name is unimportant. Everyone in this room has made a statement. Each of us is dedicated to improving the lives of our neighbors.

I am extremely proud to be associated with the Food Bank and our member agencies. You are the spearhead of our mission. You are on the front lines. Whenever I start feeling disconnected from what we are doing, I schedule a visit

to one of our member agencies, to one of you. It is always a sobering reminder of why we all work so hard.

For those of you who I have not had the pleasure to interact with, my primary functions here at the Food Bank are as follows:

- Soliciting, establishing and maintaining relationships with businesses involved with food distribution.
- Assisting groups, individuals and organizations with food drives.
- Acting as the liaison for the farms and the Community Farm program.
- Engaging member agencies to participate in our co-op program.

Each of us has personal reasons why we work in this particular arena. Mine is very simple. It is an opportunity to give back. Growing up on the East Side of Providence, I was raised in a blue collar neighborhood. Looking back, there was more poverty around me than I realized. I was fortunate to have two working parents and to be an only child.

As an adult, married with two children, I moved to the suburbs to escape the negativity of urban life. It was at this time that I discovered that the world is truly round. The further I backed away from my past, the more quickly it approached me from the rear.

Food insecurity shows no prejudice: Rural or urban; Black, White, Latino or Asian; Man or woman; Young or old. In these economic times, the lines between the haves and have-nots are almost indistinguishable. Any set of unfortunate incidents can move a family from one side to the other.

I can only imagine the mental anguish that must accompany parents who are unable to provide adequate meals for their children. I can also only imagine the humility that accompanies these same adults reaching out for assistance. It is the caring way we provide assistance which makes me most proud to be affiliated with all the people in this room: serving people with dignity and respect; embracing the challenges of serving people of diverse multi-cultural backgrounds; and providing not only food, but community outreach and referral services.

Ironically, at its core, I believe the ultimate goal of the Food Bank is to put ourselves out of business. I know we all look forward to the day when our

services are no longer needed. Until that day occurs, I will proudly work with each of you to ease the burden in people's lives.

Andrew Schiff:

That's a tough act to follow. You can see why I'm so proud of the Food Bank's staff members.

This week, after our Annual Meeting, we will focus our attention and our efforts on the upcoming food drive, Scouting for Food. In 2009, Scouting for Food will complete its 22<sup>nd</sup> year. Over this history, Scouts have collected over 6 million pounds of food in Rhode Island.

Did you ever wonder: how do people know when it's time for Scouting for Food? What reminds them to fill those bags for the Scouts to pick up?

Each year, for the past 17 years, there's been one answer to those questions: Mike Montecalvo.

You all know Mike today as the co-anchor of the news on WPRI and Fox, but he has spent over 20 years working as a broadcaster on radio and TV.

Each year, Mike dedicates his time and energy to promoting Scouting for Food through public service announcements and timely news pieces. He is surely responsible for the great success of this annual food drive. And nothing gets in his way. This year, not even a broken foot and crutches could stop him.

Mike is here tonight and I'm very pleased to present him with the Food Bank's Leadership Award for setting an inspiring example for the community.