Mask in place, Jim Luoma makes his way into the Enfield Food Pantry to a chorus of volunteers’ cheery greetings. His blue eyes crinkle and you can imagine the smile under his mask.

“I don’t need a lot of dry goods. Save that for someone who needs it,” Jim says. “I just need milk and a little meat.”

Pastor Jean Owners, pantry coordinator, points him toward cartons of powdered milk. “Those will be good at the cabin,” she says.

Jean seems to know all about Jim, a pantry client for three or four years. When he began to lose weight last fall while undergoing chemotherapy and radiation for lung cancer, she...
PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

Despite all the uncertainty and change that we’ve had to endure over the past several months due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we have witnessed countless examples of resilience, cooperation and innovation throughout our community in response to these unprecedented circumstances. Our initial fears that COVID-19 would force our partner pantries and meal programs across the region to close proved to be unfounded. In truth, nearly 90% of our partners — mostly staffed by senior volunteers at higher risk for contracting the virus, not only remained open but doubled down their efforts by expanding their days of operation, offering home deliveries, and developing drive-thru distribution methods to minimize contact.

Our donors have also come through with record levels of support, giving more than ever and encouraging others to join in their campaigns to raise funds for our work. Several organizations and small businesses have hosted quarantine-themed fundraisers and donated the proceeds to us. Countless supporters and first-time donors young and old used their talents, skills and affiliations to raise donations during this unprecedented time of need.

All of us here at the Food Bank are extremely grateful for the strength and support we’ve received from all of you. We are inspired by your commitment to our work which serves as a reminder that when we work together, anything is possible.

In partnership,

Natasha R. Thompson
President & CEO

NO TIME TO RETIRE

Darlene and David Bachman were just about ready to retire from food pantry volunteer service when the COVID-19 pandemic hit New York State and put the Bachman’s plans on hold.

Darlene has coordinated the Pennsylvania Avenue United Methodist Food Pantry for 14 years, with David volunteering alongside her. The pantry operates twice a month, typically serving 150 families each day.

So, the Bachmans decided to stay and the pantry quickly responded by developing social-distancing processes for volunteers. At the time, the pantry saw up to 400 families attending each drive-thru distribution.

“So many people who have never needed help were showing up,” Darlene says. “It’s a whole different dynamic than it’s ever been before.”
made sure he had the high-calorie nutritional drinks that sustained him when his treatments ravaged his appetite. Jean is relieved she has been able to get the shakes from the Food Bank; previously, the pantry had to raise private donations to keep them in stock. Thankfully, he is currently in remission, but he still relies on the extra nutrition.

“Jean is phenomenal. She will not turn anyone away,” Jim says. “She’s got a heart that will not let anyone go hungry.”

Prior to the pandemic, Enfield Food Pantry served about 200 families a week at its distributions on Sundays and Mondays. Within two weeks of school and business closures in mid-March, pantry attendance doubled. But Enfield was ready.

“Our distribution the second week of March went on as normal but while we were doing it, I was thinking about what our clients would need in a lockdown,” Jean says. “I have been taught that panic leads to very poor decision making. I just started looking at the administration angle of how we’d deal with a lockdown. We did a lightning-fast transformation of pantry operations in the first week.”

Volunteers compiled all the available pantry products into an online shopping list on the church website and set up a Google form for clients to select drive-thru pickup times. Client choice is a matter of dignity, according to Jean. But in the early days of coronavirus fears, the risk of people mingling in the pantry was too great.

“Jean is phenomenal. She will not turn anyone away,” Jim says. “She’s got a heart that will not let anyone go hungry.”

“We delivered a high volume while maintaining client and worker safety. I was so proud,” Jean says. “By that next week, we had taken orders from over 300 clients who selected exactly what they needed from our menu. We gathered a group of volunteers who spent two days packing and another group who delivered packages to the vehicles as they drove past the pantry.”

Concerned about other pantries’ ability to serve during the shutdown, Enfield Food Pantry removed its town residency requirement. Displaced workers from local businesses stepped in to volunteer. The pantry organized a team of delivery drivers for high-risk clients and those without transportation. Enfield was among the first pantries to re-open its door to clients in May. Keeping everyone safe, preserving clients’ dignity and providing a stigma-free grocery-shopping experience are among Jean’s top priorities for the pantry.

Jean says she and the Enfield community learned a lot about hunger and need during the COVID-19 crisis.

“This whole experience has been an education for me. We were getting ready to start an expansion program for the pantry and we were bouncing ideas around as to what a facility would look like,” Jean says. “COVID-19 opened up my eyes to the demands we may be facing repeatedly. And we can’t stumble. Our mission is to be a hunger-free community; we have to be ready.”
RACING TO END HUNGER

Watkins Glen International (WGI) has hosted a wide array of cars in its 37-year speedway history: stock cars, Busch trucks, Indy, Grand Prix, Formula One...

In May, WGI welcomed a whole new type of vehicle: Food Bank delivery trucks during its first Community Food Distribution.

With so many Southern Tier residents out of work and school during the pandemic, the need for emergency food outgrew the previous distribution site in downtown Watkins Glen.

“When we were thinking about what other locations in Schuyler County could accommodate one of these distributions, the first spot that came to our mind was WGI,” says Natasha Thompson, Food Bank president and CEO. “WGI and its RACE Foundation have supported our work in so many different ways and understand food insecurity.”

“That’s what Watkins Glen International does; we do a lot of charity work and we have a lot of fun,” Michael Printup, WGI president said. “But, when we are able to do something like this in such a challenging time, this really brings it to heart.”

30 DAYS OF GIVING

The sisters of Alpha Kappa Alpha have been working to help meet their neighbors’ basic needs since the sorority was founded at Howard University in 1908. When COVID-19 shutdowns began to take place, members of the Finger Lakes chapter rallied to support the Food Bank as part of the 30 Days of Giving Challenge, which encouraged sisters to donate $19.08.

“Over the 36 years of our charter, we have always had a focus on food insecurity; by adopting a family, serving at local soup kitchens, developing partnerships with Southside Community Center and Loaves and Fishes in Ithaca, and with Ernie Davis Community Center in Elmira,” says Millicent Clarke-Maynard, AKA life member and retired educator, Ithaca City School District.

The service project raised over $1,000 and gave local members an opportunity to learn more about the Food Bank of the Southern Tier.

“I think it is important to remember that unless we become politically-engaged in changing the decision about who has access to what, 20 years from now we’ll be talking about the same issues,” says Tanya Saunders, president, AKA Omicron Nu Omega Chapter of Ithaca, and retired assistant provost for International Programs, Ithaca College adds.