Each December, a merry band of elves pulls up their striped stockings and takes to the streets in our Selfless Elf 5K presented by Wegmans. Our selfless elves will kick off the holiday season in the spirit of giving for the fourth year, as they walk and run to provide meals to neighbors throughout the Southern Tier.

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Dear Friends,

As I reflect on 2017, I’m not only reminded of how much we’ve accomplished this year, but I’m also filled with gratitude for the people and partnerships that have contributed to our success.

Our most public accomplishment this year was receiving the Food Bank of the Year award from Feeding America, the nation’s food banking network. We were honored and humbled to have been selected from 200 food banks across the country for this recognition and it was an amazing feeling to share this award with everyone who made it possible including our agencies, volunteers, donors and clients.

I’m grateful for the progress we’ve made towards increasing the nutritional quality of the food we distribute and, specifically, our focus on fresh produce. As I write this, we are on track to distribute more than 3 million pounds of produce this year which is a tremendous resource to the people we serve who often lack access to affordable, nutritious food.

We also recognize that it takes more than food to end hunger which is where our Speakers Bureau program fits in. Our Speakers Bureau continued to gain traction this year with the completion of a second series in Binghamton with eight graduates. Upon completion of the program, our goal is to engage our graduates in meaningful ways. We were excited to bring two Speakers Bureau graduates to the National Anti-Hunger Policy Conference in Washington D.C. this year where they had the opportunity to speak to their elected officials on Capitol Hill. They led a workshop on the importance of engaging people with lived experience in advocacy efforts. They moved a crowd of over 200 people to a standing ovation.

It was a life-changing experience for everyone involved and it’s been great to be able to take our work in this direction.

We could never pursue these innovative strategies without your encouragement and support. I continue to be grateful for, and humbled by, the incredible support we receive from our generous donors and loyal volunteers who make everything possible.

I look forward to seeing what incredible things 2018 has in store for the Food Bank and our network.

In the meantime, I hope you all enjoy a happy and healthy holiday season.

In Partnership,

Natasha R. Thompson
President & CEO

Read about one special volunteer on page 4.
The Addison Knight Elves, a team of employees and supporters from the Addison Central School District, are among our most dedicated selfless elves. The group raised more than $2,000 last year and earned the top fundraising team medal. The Knight Elves team, named for the district’s knight mascot, is led by Tanya Loomis and Amy Thorson.

Tanya, district Supervisor of Special Education, says the entire school district rallies together to support the Food Bank through Selfless Elf. The event becomes a morale booster and an opportunity for team bonding.

In the past, the district held food and toiletry drives, but Tanya says her colleagues understand the value of financial contributions. Tanya says, “We have gone more to the philosophy of (collecting) money because I know the buying power of the Food Bank is better; it can get more food per dollar.”

The Knight Elves have gotten creative with their fundraising. An art teacher designed a “Knights Unite” t-shirt, with $5 of every shirt sale benefitting the Food Bank. Employees paid to participate in dress down days on Fridays, with proceeds added towards the team’s goal. Team members also used the Selfless Elf team fundraising website to solicit donations from friends and family.

The reason the Knight Elves support the Food Bank is simple: “Hunger really is a significant issue in my community, and I really see that impact on our children,” Tanya says.

In Steuben County, an estimated 12,700 individuals are food insecure, and one in four children are at risk of hunger. Nearly 700 children in the county received packs of food through our BackPack Program last year.

“I was really struck right before the race (last year); we went and we worked at the food pantry in Addison. It was huge - how many people were there. The numbers are growing,” Tanya shared. “And I think what is even more distressful is that people are employed, but they their wages are not enough to provide adequately for themselves and their families.”

And so the Addison Knight Elves run. And walk. And raise money and awareness for the Food Bank’s mission to build and sustain hunger-free communities throughout the Southern Tier. These selfless helpers will participate in the 5K this year for the third time. Each year, the group grows larger and the donations more plentiful.

We thank the Addison Knight Elves and the Addison community for supporting our mission and raising funds in a creative way for those in need during the holidays!

Do you want to give the Addison Knight Elves a run for their money? Register and fundraise for this year’s Selfless Elf 5K! December 2, 2017 | Horseheads www.foodbankst.org

The most effective advocates for any cause are those who live the struggle. The Food Bank’s advocacy efforts evolved this year as we helped food pantry clients find their voice. Many of our clients seek ways to give back to their community. Our Speakers Bureau program enables client interaction with legislators and decision makers, giving clients opportunities to educate community leaders about the realities hunger and its root causes.

One of our advocates, Rosemary P., sought food and services at her local pantry in Tioga County, a member agency of the Food Bank, after a disability ended her 24 year nursing career. “I was not only a caregiver by profession, I’m also a caregiver by personality, so it was hard for me being in the line,” she says. “Now that I’m on a fixed income, I can’t give financially like I had before.”

Rosemary had never shared her story or been involved in politics. In fact, she had never voted and had only registered to vote a few years before. She had the desire but needed a method for meaningful participation. Rosemary completed our Speakers Bureau last year and became a vocal advocate for those living on a fixed income. She has joined the Food Bank and other hunger-relief advocates on visits to elected officials in Albany.

“I’ve always believed that one person can make a difference, because they make a difference in someone else’s life and the cycle continues,” Rosemary says.

People who have lived with food insecurity must be included in our advocacy work. Their perspectives advance critical services and policies related to hunger and poverty in our communities.

Involvement in our shared mission has empowered Rosemary and our other Speakers Bureau advocates. Participation has transformed their lives, and our staff and supporters have been reenergized watching them find their voice.
In October, CHOW and the Food Bank celebrated five years of partnership in the mission to end hunger. Staff from both organizations, as well as partner agencies and local elected officials, gathered at the CHOW warehouse to celebrate the progress we’ve made uniting against hunger.

The Food Bank and CHOW had worked in collaboration for many years but streamlined the partnership five years ago when CHOW became a redistribution organization, a smaller regional warehouse that serves one county. Together, we leverage resources at the regional and local levels to create greater impact in the Broome County community. With our partner agencies, farm and retail donors, CHOW’s Mobile Markets, and the Food Bank’s Mobile Food Pantry and BackPack programs, we have greatly enhanced the ways we respond to hunger in the county.

“Beyond compliance and efficiency, building the capacity to serve more people is what really excites staff at both organizations,” said Matt Griffin, Food Bank Director of Agency Services and Nutrition.

Last year, the Food Bank and CHOW acquired, rescued and distributed more than 3 million meals in Broome County.

Jack Seman, director of CHOW said, “Our partnership is integral in serving more than 27,000 people in Broome County who face hunger. I look forward to another five years of partnership.”

We are stronger together. Our partnership with CHOW allows us to feed more people in Broome County, which has the greatest need in our six-county service area, and get closer to meeting the annual need of nearly 5 million meals.

WE ARE THANKFUL FOR … OUR COMMITTED VOLUNTEERS

If you were anywhere near the finish line at the Tour de Keuka charity bike ride in July, you couldn’t help but notice an exuberant woman in black and white cheering on the cyclists who rode to raise money for the Food Bank.

After the event, which raised nearly $70,000 towards our hunger relief programs, we received numerous compliments on our finish line cheerleader who brought hearty smiles to the faces of riders and spectators alike. “Who was that awesome lady at the finish line?” queried commenters on finish line photos posted to social media.

That awesome lady is Carole Wereski, an AARP volunteer from Elmira. She has been volunteering with AARP for several months and has participated with them in food sorting and repacks at the Food Bank warehouse, helped at partner food pantries, and advocated for hunger relief policies to local elected officials.

“The Food Bank is fantastic. And getting involved with the people there is tremendous. It’s like meeting new friends, and getting to know everyone,” Carole says. “The respect that they have for the people in need - it's amazing.”

Carole was a first time cheerleader at Tour de Keuka this year, where 200 riders embarked on a 16, 45, 58 or 100 mile ride around Keuka Lake on July 22. She already plans to take her spot at the finish line next year.

“It made me feel so important to put a smile on somebody’s face, and that was fantastic!” Carole says. And she certainly made the cyclists who ended their ride and fundraising efforts at her finish line feel important, too.

We are so thankful to Carole and our many volunteers who donate their time, talents and good will to support the Food Bank’s efforts to help feed our community.