

WINTER 2019

food bank  
of the Southern Tier

# the Harvester

Working Together To Build And Sustain  
Hunger-Free Communities Throughout The Southern Tier



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## WHATEVER IT TAKES

Charles Thomas came to Bath in 2000 a broken man. After 30 years of drug abuse, trouble keeping jobs, and run-ins with the law, he had no choice but to make a change. He was at a Veterans Affairs facility in Pennsylvania when a fellow veteran sang praises about the Bath VA and the surrounding community. So, Charles got on a bus and he's lived here ever since.

"I came to Bath with nothing. I was homeless. I was an addict. I said, 'I want to do whatever it takes to get well.'"

And he did.

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**food bank**  
of the Southern Tier

**Food Bank of the Southern Tier**  
388 Upper Oakwood Ave  
Elmira, NY 14903  
T: 607.796.6061  
[foodbankst.org](http://foodbankst.org)



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Stories and photos by  
Maria Strinni,  
Communications Manager



## GET INVOLVED!

It's the 10th anniversary of the Tioga Downs Virtual Turkey Drive! Tioga Downs Casino Resort matches donations up to \$20,000, and they triple donations on Triple Turkey Thursday on November 21! If you'd like to help families gather over a bountiful holiday feast, you can give online through Thanksgiving Day at [www.foodbankst.org](http://www.foodbankst.org).

Our Food Bank elves are hard at work making sure this year's Selfless Elf 5k Walk-Run is our jolliest event yet! 1,500 elves will take to the streets of Horseheads on December 7 in a sea of red and green to each raise 105 meals with their

participation donations. Runners and walkers of all ages and abilities can participate in this fun family event. It's also a great way to organize your business or service organization in a holiday get-together. Register at [www.SelflessElf5k.org](http://www.SelflessElf5k.org)!

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The fall season always reminds me that we live in one of the most beautiful parts of the country. I love driving into work each morning along country roads framed by rolling hills, farmland, and quaint small towns. This time of year, when the trees are ablaze with brightly colored leaves that reflect off the surface of our magnificent Finger Lakes, it can be easy to forget that hunger lives here, too.

Hunger is often hidden, up in the hills, the trailer parks or the forgotten parts of town where the factories used to be. In the Southern Tier region, an estimated 15 percent of the total population and nearly half of school aged children struggle with hunger. This is why we are always working to educate the general public about the issue of hunger and food insecurity, especially during Hunger Action Month in September.

Each year, we join other Feeding America food banks across the country to raise awareness about hunger and encourage people to take action throughout the month. The level of support we saw this year was truly incredible.

Wegmans' Fill the Bus food donation drive kicked off Hunger Action Month and brought in over 135,000 lbs of kid friendly food for our Backpack program, a 73 percent increase over last year, and nearly half of the food we need to support the program for an entire school year.

Our Leader of the Pack corporate challenge, presented by Mengel



Metzger Barr, drew 15 teams with over 200 people competing to pack more than 10,000 bags for our Backpack Program. The event raised donations for our hunger relief programs and generated so much good will.

Finally, we were honored to host NYS Agriculture & Markets Commissioner Richard Ball at our facility along with several of our local elected officials including Assemblywoman Donna Lupardo, Chair of the Assembly Agriculture Committee. We are fortunate to have the support of our local farmers and growers who have contributed generously to our work over the years.

My team and I are reminded each day that hunger lives here in the Southern Tier and impacts so many of our neighbors, including children. But the support we receive from this generous community gives us hope and feeds our commitment to continue to do this important work.

In partnership,

Natasha R. Thompson  
President & CEO



## A NATURAL FIT: FOOD PANTRY AT SCHOOL

Hermoine Buckley knows what it's like to need a little help, and she enjoys the opportunity to lend a hand. Hermoine works with her classmates at the GST BOCES Bush Campus School Food Pantry in Elmira Heights to help families who struggle to provide enough nutritious food at home. "It's just a nice thing to do," she says. "Not everybody has the time and the money to get these things for themselves. I've been through things like this."

Hermoine and her family have used food pantries and the Backpack Program to help stretch their food budget.

"My parents make sure we have enough to eat and a roof over our heads," Hermoine says. "We do struggle sometimes. We don't have all we need all the time."

That's the case for many families in the Southern Tier. One in five children are at risk of hunger; higher than the national average. Throughout the six counties we serve, nearly 42,000 children

qualify for free and reduced-priced school meals. A quarter of those children live in households that earn just enough to disqualify for federal nutritional assistance like SNAP.

The GST BOCES pantry opened last spring and serves about 125 adults and children in 35 households. Families order monthly, choosing foods for about seven meals from a menu of staple items.

Debi Hyde, a school social worker, is the School Food Pantry Coordinator and was a driving force in establishing the pantry, along with a team of educators and administrators on campus.

"We have done the Backpack Program for three or four years and we really have seen the value for families," Debi says. "A food pantry seemed like a natural fit for our setting. It's also valuable experience for our work study program."

Students in the Phoenix Academy



*Hermoine Buckley works in the new School Food Pantry at GST BOCES, helping classmates in need and earning graduation credits.*

earn credit toward their Career Development and Occupational Studies diploma. They helped create an order form for families. They place orders, receive and unpack Food Bank deliveries, stock shelves and deliver food to students. Hermoine says she likes practicing real job skills and developing a strong work ethic.

"Having enough food is just such a basic right," Debi says. "In our country, people shouldn't have to worry about food insecurity. My biggest hope is that we are helping people get what they need. It's just one small way to help families."

## WHATEVER IT TAKES *continued from page 1*

When Charles was drafted into the US Army in 1971, the 19-year-old thought he was headed to Vietnam. Instead he was stationed in Heidelberg, Germany. He was a member of the Military Police during the 1972 Olympics in Munich, where a Palestinian terrorist group killed 11 Israeli Olympians.

"A lot of things happened in Munich that I still have problems with," he says. "Drug use would cover it, but it doesn't work because the problem is still there. You have to go back to the first hurt and deal with it."

When Charles began his addiction recovery at the Bath VA Hospital, he was diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Bipolar Disorder. And while he takes responsibility for his choices, he says the diagnosis made sense of many of his self-destructive actions. Charles credits the VA with helping him turn his life around.

"I enjoy life today," says Charles, who doesn't look near his 67 years. He lives to help other veterans and community members access local services to escape addiction and poverty.

"I use the resources around here. I go to the Mobile



*Charles Thomas fought his way out of homelessness, addiction and poverty and built a new life in Bath with his wife Ruth.*

Food Pantries. You don't have to go hungry or homeless. There's help," he says.

Charles volunteers at the VA Hospital, provides hope at addiction counseling groups and serves on his church board. He recently completed the Food Bank's Speakers Bureau Program and is becoming an advocate for others facing hunger and food insecurity.

"It's by grace and mercy that I'm still here after the way I lived. And that means I have a purpose," Charles declares. "There are some flowers that bloom early and some flowers that bloom late. I'm a late-blooming flower. I don't want to leave anything materialistic behind — just a good name."

# THE LEADER OF THE PACK

Amazing things happen when our community comes together in support of a common goal!

Thanks to the creative energy of one of our long-time corporate partners, Mengel Metzger Barr & Company, 15 businesses visited our warehouse in the spirit of camaraderie and friendly competition. Mengel Metzger Barr sponsored the Leader of the Pack corporate packing challenge to celebrate the accounting firm's 40th anniversary serving the Elmira area.

Businesses donated \$2,500 each to participate in the challenge on Hunger Action Day. Teams had one hour to pack the most bags of food for children in our Backpack Program, which provides kid-friendly foods for students to take home on weekends and holiday breaks.

Our friends at First Heritage Federal Credit Union won the Leader Cup as the first to finish packing 720 bags. Watkins Glen International took home the Impact Award for the most bags packed including their donation of extra Bonus Bags.

In total, the teams packed more than 10,000 packs of food for kids in the Backpack Program!

With entry donations and additional Bonus Bags purchased, the event raised \$56,000 to help provide 168,000 meals for our neighbors in need!

We are so grateful to our local business leaders for helping us build and sustain hunger-free communities in the Southern Tier.



More than 225 volunteers from 15 local businesses packed food for kids in our warehouse on Hunger Action Day.



Team First Heritage Federal Credit Union took home the Leader Cup as the first team to complete the packing challenge!



Members of Team Mengel Metzger Barr pack food during the Leader of the Pack.

Log on to [www.foodbankst.org/leaderofthepack](http://www.foodbankst.org/leaderofthepack) to see photos of all the participating teams from Leader of the Pack.



## DOLLARS FOR DOERS

Every year, Doug Mugglin of Corning donates his time to the Food Bank as a member of the Tour de Keuka bike ride planning committee and the Corning Incorporated Foundation makes a gift to the Food Bank on his behalf through its Dollars for Doers program.

Dollars for Doers is one of two employee programs

funded by the Corning Foundation. In addition to a donation matching program, the foundation donates \$150 for every 10 hours of volunteer time logged by any Corning employee for recognized charitable organizations.

"The Food Bank is my first-choice charity," says Doug, a Senior Finishing Process Engineer at Corning's diesel facility. "In the past, before I worked at Corning, my family needed food assistance for a short time

### LEARN MORE:

[www.corningfoundation.org](http://www.corningfoundation.org)  
[www.tourdekeuka.com](http://www.tourdekeuka.com)

while I was between jobs after a down-sizing. Food is a necessity of life. It's critical to children's growth and a family's well-being. When the budget's too tight to afford enough healthy food, it raises stress levels fast."

Doug has ridden the Tour de Keuka since 2012 and has helped with route management since 2015.

"The Food Bank does a fantastic job of stretching the dollars they receive into multiple, nutritious meals for our friends and neighbors in the Southern Tier. As a process engineer, I admire their efficiency and performance," Doug says. "Plus, the Tour de Keuka is one of my favorite rides in this area, so it's a double win for me to volunteer to help organize a great event that supports my favorite charity."

We are grateful to the many Corning Incorporated employees who volunteer at the Food Bank, and to the Corning Foundation for promoting their involvement in community organizations.

Working together to build and sustain hunger-free communities throughout the Southern Tier

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