

the **Harvester**

Getting to Know Mark Bordeau: Our Questions and His Answers



Mark Bordeau recently joined the Food Bank as President and CEO, bringing more than two decades of experience in the hunger relief and nonprofit sectors, as well as nine years as a Food Bank board member.

Mark shares his thoughts on the new position, how his experience prepares him for the role, and how he sees the Food Bank supporting partners in this period of record high food requests.

What inspired you to take this role?

For me, it was many things. I have believed in the mission and vision of the Food Bank since I first started with the Backpack Program in 2006. I saw firsthand how great the program is, and received positive feedback from parents, teachers, and administrators.

From there, the relationship just kept growing. I became a board member for nine years, a financial advocate of the capital campaign, and continued to support the Food Bank monthly.

We partnered together on other projects, like creating the Broome County Child Hunger Task Force, working together to distribute food during the flood of 2011, working very closely during the pandemic, advocating together in Albany and Washington, even traveling together to attend a Food Research and Action

Center (FRAC) conference, and serving as community leader for Wendy's Walk for Kids that raised \$54,000 for the Food Bank.

All that said, when the opportunity came up to lead an organization that I love, partner with, and believe in, I embraced the challenge.

How have your career and life experiences prepared you for the role?

During my 32-year career, I saw the importance nutritious food has in the development of a child. I was blessed to have an amazing mentor who really guided me and inspired me to get involved at a higher level by visiting soup kitchens in D.C., advocating for better hunger, nutrition, and agriculture policies, and joining boards of directors that have impacts on hunger and nutrition in the community.



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Your Support Helps Communities Adjust to Change

With your help, the popular School Food Centers being used in 18 communities across our six-county region have grown from the roots of the Backpack Program, which provides food to students to take home over the weekend. These centers have taken the best parts of the Backpack Program and adapted them to fit what is most needed now.



One School Food Center can be found at Enfield Elementary School. Partnering with the local pantry to support students and their families, it is set up just like a pantry, but located within the school.

A long-time Backpack Program partner, Enfield saw its priorities shift during the pandemic, making the switch an easy choice.

“Almost two dozen kids got backpacks, and one of the things we started to hear from families was that they wanted more control over what food was coming home, that they were getting a lot of some things and not enough of others,” says school Principal Keith Harrington. “We have a huge population of students, staff, and community that could benefit from a wider program anyway. So that was the kernel of where this idea started, to provide more choice to a bigger population.”

Aileen Granger, Associate Principal at Enfield Elementary and the staff member who oversees the program, cites Enfield’s more rural location despite its proximity to Ithaca.

“A term that gets sort of thrown around a lot is ‘food desert,’ meaning that people don’t have local access to healthy foods, so this is a way to combat that and work directly with kids and staff in the building to destigmatize where and how

we’re nourished,” she says. “Having it be a grocery center rather than the Backpack Program has allowed for some choice for our kids when they are choosing foods that they like.”

Having the ability to work with the Enfield Food Pantry has helped the School Food Center tremendously.

“We’ve been fortunate to work closely with the Enfield Food Pantry and we have some staff that volunteer as well,” says Aileen. “We’ve been really cognizant of having similar goals and similar missions but not wanting to duplicate the same work. We’re able to get our snacks with our partnership from the Enfield Food Pantry and that way we’re able to focus on getting foods into our food center that kids and staff alike are going to be making choices about to take home.”

Thanks to you, sites like the Enfield School Food Center can continue to provide for their communities.

“Because of gifts from donors, we have the freedom to look at what the kids want and be responsive to our community, and we’re really grateful for that,” Keith adds. “We have repeatedly heard requests for fresh produce, fresh fruits, frozen meats, and frozen breads. Those things tend to be more expensive for families. Having the funds that allow us to have those here and available to families is really fantastic.”

Drawing in students and their families — and by extension, the entire Enfield community — has meant developing a sense of ownership.

“What I’ve felt each time that I’ve come in is all the individuals in this school really feel a sense of ownership here now, and they feel a sense of place and purpose,” Keith says. “You walk in and it’s not a mess. We’ve got over 200 people using this space, and it is, to me, one of the most cared-for spaces in the school. And that’s no small thing. That is a visual and a physical representation of a deepening partnership, even between us and our students.”

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What are your plans for the first six months?

I will be learning and observing. I will be doing a lot of visits with our agencies, partners, supporters, and staff. I'll probably even jump on a truck to ride around with our drivers. This will help me prepare for the second six months, when we will start envisioning and creating our 2025-28 strategic plan.

What do you see as the Food Bank's role in helping to alleviate some of the burden that our partner agencies are seeing with this year's record numbers of food requests?

We must help them any way we can. We have to secure more funding and more access to good food. Anything we can do to take that money and make it stretch further for our partners, to leverage for better buying power, is critical.

We need to continually advocate, which we do so well. But we need more. It's advocating based on the challenges. We need to have a very loud voice in the arena, whether it's for state or federal programs.

Finally, we need to be more flexible to meet the needs of the partner agencies. That is why on



Sept. 25, after months of research, the warehouse team implemented a new delivery schedule that better serves the needs of the agencies and allows them to offer more fresh local items like dairy, eggs and fresh produce.

“When the opportunity came up to lead an organization that I love, partner with, and believe in, I embraced the challenge.”

— Mark

'Tis the Season of Giving, with Your Support



The 14th annual **Virtual Turkey Drive** is live through Thanksgiving Day, with a matching contribution from Tioga Downs Casino Resort.

In 2022, YOU helped provide nearly 7,500 turkeys — almost 13 tons of bird — with all the trimmings through the Food Bank's network of more than 135 hunger-relief member agencies, including food pantries. Other options, such as hams and turkey breasts, were added to accommodate client requests.

This year, requests are more than 50% higher than in 2022, which makes your generosity even more crucial.

Give now at [foodbankst.org](https://www.foodbankst.org) to bring the holidays home to a neighbor in need.



Advocates Speak Their Truth, with Your Help

You helped provide a golden opportunity for 11 new graduates from the Food Bank's Community Advocates Training Program to put their skills to the test over the summer.

First, five members made live presentations during a graduation ceremony and spoke of the hardships, perseverance, and inspiration that led them to participate in the program. Another graduate recorded her speech for the large audience to watch. They had an opportunity to connect with Congressman Marc Molinaro, who also spoke at the event, sharing his own story of growing up with food insecurity.

The Food Bank's Community Empowerment Coordinator, Jackie Bogart, along with four graduates, attended the Feeding America Elevating Voices Power Summit in Washington, D.C.

The event brought together individuals with lived experience of food insecurity from across the nation to hear from, learn from, and connect with each other in advocating for a stronger tomorrow. There were also opportunities to meet with elected officials.

"The trip itself was a wonderful experience, meeting people from all over the country who were experiencing some of the same experiences that I have encountered being on benefits, and supporting others receiving benefits," says Nordia Hoff, Pantry Coordinator

at the Friendship Seventh Day Adventist Church in Elmira. "It was also a wonderful opportunity for us to network and meet others who might have ideas of how best to manage our different pantries and other businesses."

For program graduate Dawn Tallett, the conference had an even deeper meaning.

"Calling this last trip to D.C. and the Feeding America Elevating Voices Power Summit an incredible experience would be an understatement," she said. "The first thing I felt was important. This doesn't happen often and when it does, I must stop myself from feeling like I don't deserve it."

"It was exciting for me to see Feeding America employees from the Anti-Hunger Policy Conference, and I was surprised when they remembered me. Claire Babineaux-Fontenot, CEO of Feeding America, called me 'her Dawn,' and as silly as it sounds, it lifted me up and made me believe that all my lived experience of the last 18 years IS important. I am important."



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