



Patchwork Pantry News

A 501(C)3 organization

Patchwork Pantry's First Quarter-Century

The Pantry opened its doors in May 1992, 25 years ago this month. Then and now, its center of operation was Community Mennonite Church, giving out food Wednesday evenings and served by a board representing various faith communities. Leading organizers were former pantry director Sheri Hartzler, now living in Romania, and the late Dick Petonke. In the pantry's first 12 months, more than 5,000 people received food, totaling more than 24 tons. Countless people and organizations deserve credit for 25 years of meeting this basic need. Thank you to all!

New Board President and Member

Julie Alderfer-Stauffer

Jan Jenner has kindly accepted the pantry board's invitation to serve as board president. Jan has lived in Harrisonburg for the past 20 years. She worked at the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding at Eastern Mennonite University, retiring in 2015. She has remained active and involved as an adjunct instructor for two EMU programs, a pastoral elder at Community Mennonite Church, a board member at Our Community Place, and spending significant time with her 92-year old mother. She and her husband Hadley are parents of three grown children, and two (amazing, of course) grandchildren. Jan has known about Patchwork Pantry since her arrival in Harrisonburg, and has volunteered there several times. She's looking forward to her work with the PP board.



Jan Jenner

Gloria Rhodes, who joined the pantry board this Spring, is associate professor of peacebuilding and conflict studies at Eastern Mennonite University. She chairs the department of Applied Social Sciences, is a faculty member of the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding, and coordinates the Peacebuilding and Development undergraduate major. Gloria teaches graduate and undergraduate peacebuilding courses including conflict analysis, peacebuilding theory and practice and the integration of these. Holding a Ph.D. from George Mason University's Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, she has led study seminars in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, Russia, South Korea, and the Navajo Nation.

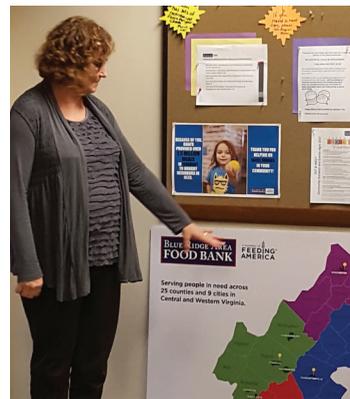
The Food Bank: a visit to Verona

By Chris Edwards

April's pantry board meeting was a special occasion: carpooling to the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank at Verona. Robin Swecker, partner services coordinator for the five counties (Rockingham, Augusta, Rockbridge, Bath, Highland) and cities within them served by the Shenandoah Valley division of BRAFB, led us on a tour of the facility. Verona serves as hub for the full food bank organization, which serves 25 counties (a third of Virginia), employing 49 workers. Shenandoah feeds 35,000 per month; the entire BRAFB, 114,400.



At the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank, pantry board members tour a processing room where food gets packaged for distribution. Jennifer Ulrich.



Robin Swecker, food bank Partner Services Coordinator, shows board members the area BRAFB serves. Jennifer Ulrich.

The area food bank, founded in 1981, is part of Feeding America, a nonprofit started in the 1970s in Arizona by the late John Van Hengel after he met a mother of ten dumpster-diving while her husband was in jail, Robin informed us. The food bank operates programs including Family BackPack on weekends and school holidays, Summer Food Service for children between school sessions, Super Pantry for teaching

(continued on reverse)

the numbers

Food from Blue Ridge Area Food Bank for the past 6 months: 89,968 lbs.

Clients and volunteers, first quarter 2017:

- Total Households served – 502
- Total individuals – 2,031
- Average per night – 39 households
- Total volunteers - 386
- Total hours – 805

how to help

- **Give money.** We can always use monetary donations to help purchase food items as well as toilet paper, soap and diapers. Although we can meet needs now, our current outgo slightly exceeds income. We should prepare for any resource cutbacks or client increases that come.
- **Donate food.** Donations of non-perishable food items are always welcome. Peanut butter, pasta, canned veggies and fruit are always useful. Gardens will start coming in soon! Bring produce to CMC Wednesdays during office hours. If you would like to do a food drive, contact us at patchworkpantry@gmail.com.
- **Volunteer.** Spend a Wednesday evening bagging up food, interviewing clients, handing out donations or helping clients take food to their cars. Contact our volunteer coordinator at patchworkpantry@gmail.com to sign up.



The warehouse at Blue Ridge stacked to the ceiling with food. *Jennifer Ulrich.*

Our pantry is one of 210 agencies, with 71 in Shenandoah, supplied by the food bank to help people in need. Patchwork Pantry food committee members Sam Moore and Ken Reeves visit the Verona site most Wednesday mornings to stock up. Bread and produce come free, as does USDA food, although we pay a handling charge for prepackaged food.

Robin walked us through vast rows of shelves with groceries. A produce cooler, added in BRAFB's recent renovation to increase capacity for fresh fruits and veggies, keeps such items as tomatoes, apples and carrots at temperatures below 50F.

The \$5-million renovation and expansion, completed in Fall 2015, also entailed replacing an old farmhouse on the property with a new section for offices. Also added was a salvage area where volunteers repack bulk products. "Salvage," Robin explained, might be cereal in a box that someone opened without disturbing the inner bag, or processed cheese dyed a shade off from manufacturer specifications.

Volunteers also fill 2,500 "senior boxes" per month for Reach. Ken encourages supporters to consider such simple volunteer tasks, often in demand. (Sign up at <https://www.brafb.org/volunteer/>.)

When Robin arrived at the food bank 11 years ago, it was feeding 72,000 people monthly. The number rose to 120,000 during the recent recession, but is now about 114,000. Many working poor have part-time hours that do not allow benefits. We learned of an apparent drop in use of BRAFB and Patchwork Pantry services by immigrants, who may fear trouble with authorities. Neither organization, however, asks or reports on anyone's immigration status. "We are called to serve neighbors in need without judgement," the BRAFB mission statement reads in part.

For more information on the food bank and needs, see <https://www.brafb.org>.

A Trip to Romania

By Jennifer Ulrich

This past December I spent three weeks in Romania with Sheri Hartzler, former pantry director, and her husband, Jay. Having visited in May 2013, I was there this time for Christmas. The organization Sheri works for, Veritas Foundation, organizes several holiday events including a choir concert which Jay directs, and a Candle Walk involving prayers and music at different spots in the Citadel. It is a time to pray for the city and people of Sighisoara.

Sheri and Jay also work in Tigmandru, a gypsy village about 20 km from Sighisoara. Sheri sings and organizes crafts for 30-50 children in the Kids Club at the Nazarene Church. Jay has started a woodworking shop with three men from the village, making items including beds, desks, kitchen cabinets and night stands.

A highlight of Christmas in Tigmandru is the church Christmas program. The kids recite, sing and present the Christmas story. Lighting candles and singing, they reflect on the light Christ brings

tight-budget cooking skills, the Reach program for seniors and people with disabilities, and a Mobile Food Pantry serving rural areas.

The Verona facility houses supplies for both the Shenandoah Valley and other BRAFB divisions (Charlottesville, Lynchburg and Winchester). Warehouse stock turns over about every month or six weeks, moving 24.6M million pounds (or 12,300 tons) per month.



Veritas receives medical supplies, clothes and diapers for distribution. *Jennifer Ulrich.*

into the world. Everyone receives small candles in oranges which serve as candle holders. The children receive Christmas packages from the church.

There were other fun events; celebrating Jay and Sheri's anniversary, helping Sheri make cinnamon rolls, shopping in Corund and other places for Romanian crafts, and enjoying fare from the pizza place just below Jay and Sheri's apartment. We walked to church, to the market and most everywhere. It was a memorable way to celebrate Christmas. (Note: You can keep up with Sheri and Jay at <https://romaniannotes.wordpress.com/>.)

Baskets Given for 20 Easters

This Spring was the 20th Easter for Debbey Roadcap to provide "baskets to agencies with connections to children who may not get one otherwise." Starting in 1998, she assembled baskets at a business she operated until 2007. Since then, the project has been sponsored by her church, Dayton United Methodist.

She writes, "This year, we assembled about 910 baskets that went to 12 agencies for distribution (including 45 for Patchwork Pantry). It is an all-donation, all-volunteer project." Beginning around February, Debbey and her helpers solicit donations and volunteers, contact local service agencies, put out collection boxes and publicize needs.

"Palm Sunday weekend is always the bulk of the action," Debbey says. "We pick up the collection boxes and donations on Friday, and volunteers help sort and count to determine what we have and what we still need. Friday night and Saturday are spent shopping and setting up for the assembly. And, on Sunday afternoon, volunteers arrive to help make all the baskets needed. Monday, we deliver them to the agencies so they will have all week to get them to children/families before Easter."

All baskets are for children except at Patchwork Pantry, which requested baskets for whole families. "We assign a special group to work on your agency, anywhere from 6-10 people filling the baskets with multiple items the family and children might enjoy, then wrapping them," Debbey reports.

Examining records, she found a total of 14,784 baskets given since 1998! "What a blessing to reach that many kids through the love and support of the entire community," Debbey says, adding, "Thanks for allowing us to contribute in this small way."

Thanks to Pantry Buyers

The pantry gives basic nonfood household items to our clients when available. They're obtained by volunteer buyers through donors' monetary giving. Thanks to Sheri Smucker for serving as purchaser for five recent years. "I greatly enjoyed buying the paper products each week for the Patchwork Pantry. It allowed me to contribute to its ministry even though I couldn't come on Wednesday evenings," she recalls.

Eileen Gingrich took up the task in August 2016, purchasing toilet paper, bar soap, diapers, shampoo and toothpaste each week at Walmart. "Donations of these items are always welcomed!" Eileen says.



An Easter basket for 2017. *Debbey Roadcap.*



Sheri (right) helped Jennifer select a winter hat in Corund. *Jennifer Ulrich.*