

HUNGER PERSISTS IN COLLIER COUNTY

Mark Schwab, Class XXIII and Jerry Godshaw, Class XX ~ January 2021

Thank you to over 70 GNLeers who have thus far supported the Hunger Initiative through volunteering at various nonprofits, organizing food drives or other activities. We have certainly made a significant contribution.

We reached out to our panelists from the August webcast to get an update of their needs and issues in the new year. Here is what they had to say:

Steve Popper of Meals of Hope reported that they distributed 6 million pounds of food in 2020, four times their original budget. Their 12 food pantries were serving over 4000 families a week this past December and they continue to need volunteers to pack and distribute food.

Richard LeBer, CEO, Harry Chapin Food Bank, emphasized that the crisis continues, noting that prior to Covid-19, 1 in 8 families in Collier were experiencing food insecurity and now 1 in 5 families go home hungry. He

expects that the situation will continue through all of 2021, as many working families depend on the seasonal visitor influx and work prospects are dismal.

Prior to COVID, Harry Chapin depended primarily on donated food from various sources. Now the Food Bank is purchasing \$1 million of food per month. They need volunteers to pack the 20-25 lb. food kits and distribute the kits at 15 mobile distribution points operating 6 days a week.

Vann Ellison, CEO, St. Matthews House, was grateful for all the contributions of food and volunteer efforts of GNLeers. St. Matthews this week has supplied food to 100 times the number of families they supplied food to the same week last year. As moratoriums on evictions expire, they fear an increase in homelessness portending a greater demand on St. Matthew's services. They are already seeing a steady rise in requests for shelter. St. Matthews anticipates the demand for food will at a minimum stay at current levels through 2021 and hopes the volunteer efforts and donations remain at least at current levels. Their biggest need is for shelf stable protein such as canned tuna fish, canned chicken, protein bars, canned beans and peanut butter.

All organizations operate under strict COVID guidelines for volunteers, doing temperature checks, maintaining social distancing, and requiring masks and gloves. They also welcome opportunities to visit and speak with communities, clubs and other organizations to explain the situation and their needs.

Bottom line, the holiday season has passed, and donations tend to die down, but the need continues unabated. With more of us now in Naples for the season, we must continue the effort. [Click here to visit the hunger initiative resource page](#) and see how you can volunteer. If you feel comfortable, organize a group of friends or classmates and volunteer.

Meanwhile, let's recognize some of the specific recent efforts:

- Dick Woodbridge (Class XXI) organized a donation effort at Wilderness resulting in enough food for 30,000 meals.
- Barbara Hurt-Simmons (Class XXII) organized a food drive at Tallis Park.
- Julie Wade (Class XXI) and Barbara Davin (Class XXIII) organized food drives in 29 Pelican Bay communities which resulted in a record collection of sufficient food to produce 30,000 meals.

- JR Philp (Class XVIII) put together a second food drive at Aviano.
- Giselle Wagner (Class XXIV) continues her almost weekly volunteer effort with several classmates packing boxes at Harry Chapin and St. Matts.
- Hank White (XXI) organized a drive in Stonebridge.
- Mary Beth Jones (Class XXI) continues to work with Meals of Hope in supplying feminine hygiene products at various food pantries.
- Tom Leipzig (Class XX) and Lee Bewley (Class XXII) have organized a food drive at Grey Oaks.
- Elizabeth Strong (Class XXV) set up a virtual food drive at The Isles of Collier Preserve.