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GREATER NAPLES LEADERSHIP INITIATES GUEST COMMENTARY FROM COLLIER COUNTY FOOD PANTRY LEADERS TO ADDRESS HUNGER CRISIS

(Naples, FL) - In an effort to address and resolve the serious hunger crisis in our community, [Greater Naples Leadership](#) (GNL) has brought together the leaders of three food pantry organizations in Collier County to co-author the following Guest Commentary. These leaders are Vann Ellison, CEO of St. Matthew's House, Steve Popper, CEO of Meals of Hope and Richard LeBer, CEO of Harry Chapin Food Bank. All three presented their mission in a [webinar](#) to GNL members on August 18th, 2020, outlining the growing need for volunteers as well as food donations to reach those most in need of food during this pandemic.

GNL President Sue Dillon shares, "The facts they presented were so compelling that we thought it important to share their stories more widely. We are presenting their Guest Commentary, along with a link to the [webinar](#), in the hope that it can be shared with Naples Daily News readers. We hope you will give this important report priority in your queue. Thank you!"

Working Together to Feed the Hungry
By Vann Ellison, St. Matthew's House; Richard LeBer, Harry Chapin Food Bank;
and Stephen Popper, Meals of Hope

Too many of our neighbors are hungry. The economic impact of Covid-19 has caused hardship for many working families. Our organizations and many others are waging an unprecedented effort to feed hungry families in Collier County. We need your help.

We are in a hunger crisis. Unfortunately, we do not believe it will end soon. Many workers had their work and pay cut short in mid-March, continued federal assistance remains uncertain, and no one knows if jobs will return this fall. Parents worry about being able to

feed their children. Summer food programs are ending and virtual learning may make it difficult for those relying on school lunch programs to get their daily meals.

The need is great; the response from our community has been amazing:

- St. Matthew's House has increased food assistance to families from 40-60 families per week to 2,500 families a week.
- Meals of Hope has expanded its food pantry operations, and recently opened its twelfth mobile pantry location.
- The Harry Chapin Food Bank has more than doubled its food distributions to St. Matthew's, Meals of Hope and others. To support this, they are purchasing over \$1Million of food each month.

None of this would be possible without the widespread support of our community. This has come from many quarters: Greater Naples Leadership (GNL) recently convened a meeting with us to educate their members about the magnitude of the problem and the various ways you can get involved. You can view that discussion using this link: [GNL Combating Hunger Webinar](#). For 25 years GNL's members, now over 500 strong, commit to volunteer for nonprofit and civic service to benefit our community. We are grateful for their support.

Even with all this work, many families and children in Collier County remain hungry. There is much more everyone can do. We need volunteers to sort food, pack boxes, and distribute food at food pantries. There is plenty of work to be done, and something to suit every schedule and physical ability. The work is fulfilling, fun, and safe. It is easy to see volunteer opportunities and sign up at any of our websites or at the GNL link mentioned above.

If you can't volunteer, then please help provide food. You can donate to support an organization that serves your community. You can organize a food drive. You can even conduct a food drive without leaving home, using Harry Chapin's "virtual food drive" program. Our organizations are efficient and cost-conscious; your donation of food or money will go far.

We remain committed to prevent any of our neighbors from going hungry. Our attitude is best expressed by Vann Ellison who tells his clients, "As long as I have food on my plate, there will be food for you."

We are working together to feed families, but we cannot do it alone. Please help us meet the need for food so our neighbors don't go hungry.

For more information about Greater Naples Leadership and their efforts to address the hunger crisis in our community, please email GNL Communications Chair [Caren Arnstein](mailto:Caren.Arnstein@gnlwebsite.org), call 239.300.7055 or visit www.gnlwebsite.org.

ABOUT GREATER NAPLES LEADERSHIP

Greater Naples Leadership (GNL) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing proven leaders with a unique opportunity to learn firsthand about Collier County's challenges and to encourage the use of their skills individually and collectively in addressing these needs and bettering the community. Now in its third decade, Greater Naples Leadership continues to provide exceptional opportunities for its members to improve the community and enrich their lives through first-hand learning experiences, rewarding relationships with accomplished, like-minded individuals and unparalleled access to meaningful board and volunteer roles.

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