



## SOUTH TEXAS FOOD BANK QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

# *Food for the Mind*

WINTER 2021



**"TOGETHER, WE ARE ABLE TO PROVIDE MORE MEALS, FEED MORE FAMILIES & SPREAD MORE HOPE,"  
STFB EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ALMA BOUBEL**

There is something to be said about the saying, "It takes a village." The phrase rings a wealth of truth in our work at the South Texas Food Bank. A cycle of goodwill and generosity continue the food bank's operations. We are nothing without the support of our community, which enables us to provide meals for those in need.

Those who give money, those who give time, and those who give canned goods make our mission possible.

# HUNGER RELIEF HOLIDAY RAFFLE

## *STFB Goes Virtual*

The South Texas Food Bank took their annual fundraising efforts virtually this year for the first time. The Hunger Relief Holiday Raffle was held in lieu of the food bank's anticipated Empty Bowls, and boasted luxury prizes. For three months, board members and food bank staff banded together in pursuit of ticket sales.

Ticket sales reached the far corners of our country, with donations coming in from

New York and throughout Mexico. December 16 marked the culmination of the raffle when STFB went live on Facebook to announce the Hunger Relief Holiday Raffle winners.

Over 1,300 tickets were sold. At \$100 a ticket, each resulted in 1,000 meals to be provided for people in need. Ultimately, the event created over a million meals.

In the time before the pandemic, the food bank served an average of 60,000 to 75,000 individuals each month. That number has risen to 175,000 individuals.

STFB expresses great gratitude to their amazing sponsors, beautiful community and all those who made a ticket donation in support of ending hunger, and ultimately making their first virtual fundraiser a success!



*JESSICA LEAL, FIRST-PRIZE WINNER AND NEW OWNER OF A 2020 MERCEDES-BENZ E350, POSES WITH HER CHILDREN ALONGSIDE STFB EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ALMA BOUBEL AND STFB BOARD MEMBER ERASMO VILLARREAL.*



# HUNGER RELIEF HOLIDAY RAFFLE

## THE SPONORS

SOUTH TEXAS FOOD BANK WOULD LIKE TO SAY

# THANK YOU

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FOR THEIR GENEROSITY AND SUPPORT

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# NO SHORTAGE OF HELPING HANDS

*Volunteers don't shy away in the face of a pandemic*

*by Angie Osterman*

While many organizations in the area were severely impacted by the lack of manpower to the point of temporary closures, The South Texas Food Bank, along with the majority of its partner agencies, were able to maintain a relatively healthy number of volunteers throughout the pandemic in 2020.

A total of 81,538 hours were donated to the fight against hunger, according to the food bank's 2019-2020 Fiscal Year Report. This is an increase of 36.9 % from the previous fiscal year and quite an achievement considering an estimated two-thirds of volunteers in the U.S. had either decreased or stopped volunteering due to the pandemic, according to a study done by Fidelity Charitable.

Alma Boubel, South Texas Food Bank Executive Director, attributed this first to the cause and secondly, to the operation changes enacted by the food bank administration.

"We knew that COVID-19 was going to impact our volunteer workforce," said Boubel. "The biggest challenge was how we were going to keep them and the staff safe while keeping up with the increased demand for food and services."

"Despite the circumstances, many community groups and businesses reached out to offer us help," she added. "Honestly, it didn't surprise me because the mission of the food bank is always crucial and more so in times like these. The need for food is a very real one and we were one of the first organizations to be activated to provide immediate relief to those who were, and are, being affected by this crisis. People throughout our eight-county service area saw us on the frontline and they responded to that."

Among those who helped the food bank were civic and student groups, local and regional law enforcement agencies and the Texas Army National Guard.

As for safety, anyone who has ever volunteered at the food bank can tell you that the South Texas Food Bank is a very hands-on interactive place. Food products are handled, sorted, processed and distributed on a daily basis.

"More constant sanitation and social distance were going to be key to maintain a safe operation," said Boubel.

Besides the food safety practices that are already in place, additional measures included: limit the number of staff and volunteers in the Volunteer Center and have them be more stationary; expand the processing areas for social distance; wearing of protective masks and gloves; more sanitation stations, plus temperature checks and monitoring.

As for the distributions, all are contactless drive-thru events. Clients only have to pop open their vehicle's trunk and the volunteers put the food boxes and products inside. Volunteers must adhere to the safety protocols at the distribution sites at all times.

"Volunteers are always mission-essential. We always say that we can't do it without the help of the community and volunteers, and we certainly couldn't be helping as many people as we are without them. Thank you to everyone who has donated time to our hunger relief efforts," concluded Boubel.





# THE BUSINESS OF DISTRIBUTIONS

*STFB meets the demand on the road*

*by Angie Osterman*

Mile-long lines have become a common sight throughout the South Texas Food Bank's eight-county service area where emergency drive-thru food distributions have been held for close to a year now.

"The COVID-19 Pandemic has severely impacted our service area," said Alma Boubel, Executive Director of the South Texas Food Bank.

"Since the outbreak of the pandemic and the economic shutdown, the demand for food in these communities has increased dramatically."

The food bank's service area includes: Webb, Zapata, Jim Hogg, Maverick, Dimmit, Val Verde, Kinney and Starr counties. Boubel noted that the new challenges brought up by the pandemic have had a debilitating effect in these communities that were already hurting from food insecurity.

"More than half of the counties that the food bank serves are considered food deserts," stated Boubel. "Prior to this crisis, the food bank was one of the main sources of sustenance for food insecure people living in these communities. We are now a lifeline for many of them, especially the elderly and the unemployed."

As per Feeding America, food deserts are defined as regions where people have limited

access to healthy and affordable food due to socio-economic reasons such as having a low income or having to travel farther to find healthier food options.

Boubel also mentioned that many of the people who are attending these distributions are families and individuals who are turning to the food bank for help for the first time.





## THE BUSINESS OF DISTRIBUTIONS, CONT.

This has been the case across the country. According to a national survey conducted by market research company OnePoll released this past November, about 40% of Americans reported that this pandemic is the first time that they have experienced food insecurity and that they have had to turn to social programs and organizations like food banks for assistance.

Since the onset of the pandemic in March, the food bank has held close to 200 distributions to date, including two mass events in the summer at the Sames Auto Arena. This translates to more than 13 million pounds of food commodities given out to 300,000 families and individuals.

These COVID-19 Distributions are part of the food bank's Disaster Relief Program and are supplementary to the partner agencies' emergency food assistance efforts, many of whom have been forced to temporarily close due to the current public safety and health protocols. According to Elia Solis, Agency Relations Coordinator for The South Texas Food Bank, about 24% of the food bank's partner

agencies have been impacted by the pandemic and are currently inactive.

"Due to COVID-19, many of our agencies are unable to distribute food as often as they used to," Solis points out. "Many of them used to give out food two or three times a week, but since March, many of them have had to cut down to once a month. Some of them couldn't continue at all due to the safety measures and the lack of manpower."

These shutdowns have made mass distributions even more critical. Attendees receive a wide assortment of food items that include fresh produce and a meat product, in addition to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Farmers to Families Food Box program.

"Our staff and our trucks have been on the road, visiting these communities almost every week since March and we will continue to do so. People living in our service area can rest assured that we will continue to be there for them," assured the executive director.





## FOOD BANK SCENES FROM JANUARY- FEBRUARY



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