Getting to Know the New CEO

After having spent the prior 10 years as President & CEO of Catholic Charities of Eastern Virginia, Christopher Tan assumed leadership of the Foodbank of Southeastern Virginia and the Eastern Shore on May 2. He shares some of his initial impressions, having now settled into the job.

How have you enjoyed your time thus far here at the Foodbank?

It's been an unbelievable experience. The entire team has impressed me so very much, far exceeding my greatest hopes. The compassion they display when interacting with our clients has been inspiring and a real blessing.

Have you experienced anything you might describe as an eye-opener?

I would say our client-choice approach to food distribution certainly fits that description. The dignity of choice is quite obvious when you see what it does to the human experience. Looking at it from a purely economic viewpoint, it is more expensive than mass distribution, but we are not just here to feed people. We also want to lift them up, give them hope, and connect with them on a deeper level. We are under a great deal of financial pressure right now, so a purely client-choice model is not currently possible, but we have to keep moving in that direction to find the right balance.

Can you share with us some thoughts about the financial challenges facing the Foodbank?

You often hear people refer to this as a perfect storm, and it really is. Inflation and the price of gas has sent food prices skyrocketing. Problems with the supply chain have not only made food more expensive but also exceedingly difficult to obtain at any price. We are seeing what are considered to be staple items like pasta, peanut butter, and rice in short supply. Food manufacturers and grocery store chains are running short themselves, which means they cannot donate as much to us, the result being that we must go out onto the open market and purchase more food for ourselves. The financial pressure has been historic. Two years ago, we spent about $1 million on purchased food, last fiscal year which just ended in June, that number rose to nearly $5 million. We have been tremendously grateful to our many generous donors who have sustained us through these difficult times, but we still need their support because all the consequences of the COVID pandemic are still very clearly impacting us.

What are some of your long-term objectives?

While feeding the line occupies my thoughts, ending the line is what keeps me up at night. Nobody wants to stand in that line for the rest of their lives. For those that we can help, we need to give them a pathway toward self-sufficiency. Going forward, we will focus even more of our energies on finding and establishing strategic partnerships to fulfill our bold goal of closing the meal gap by 2025.

Feeding America Releases Annual Report on Senior Food Insecurity

For the sixth straight year, Feeding America has completed its analysis of the state of food insecurity among America’s seniors, and once again minimum improvement is evident, with certain segments of the senior population suffering more than ever. Food insecurity among seniors overall did not change significantly between 2019 and 2020 (7.1% to 6.8%). However, consistent with the overall population, there was a deepening divide along racial and ethnic lines.

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Continuing their long history of generous giving, the folks at the Perdue Foundation dropped by our Eastern Shore branch to make a donation of $25,000 to support the school Backpack Program, along with 10,000 pounds of protein to feed food insecure families on the Eastern Shore. Thank you, Perdue Farms!

More than 800 active duty, National Guard, Reserve, and veteran families received approximately 50 pounds of food each during the Military Family Advisory Network’s (MFAN) most recent drive-thru food distribution. Held in the Military Circle Mall parking lot, each family drove away with a variety of breakfast items, canned goods, household items, and coupons, along with seasonal produce provided by the Foodbank of Southeastern Virginia and the Eastern Shore.

This event is the fourth of its kind held in Norfolk since June 2021 and part of MFAN’s Combat Military Hunger initiative – a nationwide effort to address the issue of food insecurity among military and veteran populations. The campaign provides food support, connects families to community resources, brings industry leaders together to develop long-term solutions, and conducts research to identify the causal factors that lead to food insecurity.

"Like civilians, military families are impacted by the same root causes that lead to hunger and food insecurity," said Christopher Tan, President and CEO of the Foodbank of Southeastern Virginia and the Eastern Shore. "That impact is exacerbated by frequent moves and high rates of spousal unemployment due to lack of childcare. With the world's largest naval station located within our service area, our Foodbank has prioritized addressing this need among military families and is honored and proud to partner with MFAN to ensure that we serve those who sacrifice for us every day."

Earlier this year, MFAN recognized the Foodbank for our efforts to support its mission. Last year, as part of the 1 Million Meals Challenge, we helped them provide 289,623 meals to households in Hampton Roads. For military and veteran families specifically, we provided all dry goods and produce for the three drive-thru events held in 2021, along with $16,925 in grocery gift cards during the December distribution, supporting a total of 1,974 military and veteran households.
A special thanks to the folks at Hendrick Auto Group in Norfolk for their generous donation of more than $31,000 during this year’s Hunger Heroes drive!

From Behind Bars, Inmate Shows Spirit of Generosity

Every day, the staff and volunteers at the Foodbank of Southeastern Virginia and the Eastern Shore face what sometimes feels like a never-ending battle to fight food insecurity. Sometimes, it can be frustrating. Then, something happens that energizes the whole team. That’s what happened when we received a letter from Sean Brown. Though incarcerated in a Virginia prison, he writes that he has gone through what he describes as a fundamental transformation. “About 12 years ago, I felt the call, the deep urge within my soul to start becoming active in community work and giving back while still incarcerated,” he wrote.

Among other things, he now makes regular donations to the Foodbank from the modest earnings he receives from his jobs within the prison. He’s even recruited two others he’s serving time with to do the same. Foodbank Director of Development Allie Betts received the letter and quickly shared it with the team. “It was just so inspiring,” she says. “We cannot do what we do without the support of others, and that support can come from anywhere and anyone. When it’s someone whose wages are so low, it does so much to drive home the collective spirit that fuels all that we do.”

Sean says it lifts his spirit as well, adding that “I truly believe that God can use us to be blessings to others.”

The Verdict is in: Legal Food Frenzy Judged a Success!

This year’s annual statewide Legal Food Frenzy (LFF) raised $352,409 and collected 36,307 pounds of food donations for the seven Virginia food banks and their 1,500 partner agencies. In its 16th year, the competition was the first “normal” LFF initiative since before the pandemic in April 2019. Our network of food banks around the Commonwealth and the state’s legal community showed up in full force to fundraise, collect food and other necessities, and volunteer.

The 34 participating teams in our service area raised an impressive $72,516.70 and collected 29,934 pounds of food donations, including non-perishable food, lean protein, hygiene items, and baby products. We celebrated our regional winner, Roussos & Barnhart P.L.C., and the recipient of two statewide awards, Smithfield Foods Legal Dept., at an awards ceremony hosted by Attorney General Jason Miyares earlier this summer.
Feeding America Releases Annual Report on Senior Food Insecurity

The study shows that food insecurity worsened among African America seniors (from 15.5% to 19.6%) while improving for white seniors (5.0% to 4.2%), leading to wider disparities between most groups. With the senior population projected to continue growing in size over the coming decades, food insecurity among aging adults is likely to remain a public health challenge for years to come. Other findings within the report include:

» Out of 76 million seniors age 60+ in the United States, 5.2 million seniors (6.8%) were food insecure, including 2 million seniors (2.6%) who experienced very low food security.

» The current rate of food insecurity among seniors (6.8%) remains higher than the pre-Great Recession rate in 2007 (6.3%).

» In the prior 20 years, the percent of food insecure and very low food secure seniors increased by 29% and 84%, respectively.

» By 2050, it’s estimated that the senior population will grow to 104 million. If the current rate of senior food insecurity does not improve, more than 7 million seniors could be food insecure.

» In 2020, food insecurity was more than four times as high among African American seniors and more than three times as high among Latino seniors when compared to white seniors.

It was also noted that senior renters are more likely to be cost burdened, spending more than 30% of their incomes on housing than seniors who are homeowners. Most seniors are on fixed incomes, and many are unable to work. It is only through your generosity in supporting the Foodbank that we are able to help seniors throughout our 4,745 square mile service area.