



Spring 2022

In February, Operations Manager, Brad Gerdes, announced his decision to step down from his role with WAFER Food Pantry to pursue some new projects and spend more time with his family.

Brad has lived in the La Crosse area for over 40 years following graduation from the University of Wisconsin-Platteville with a degree in Industrial Engineering. He enjoyed a career of almost 30 years with Trane Air Conditioning in Engineering, Engineering Management, Operations Management and Business Leadership. He and his wife Betsy will celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary this fall. They have two married daughters and 6 grandkids in Illinois and Minnesota.

Initially, Brad joined the team as a part-time route driver, collecting donations throughout the county. During this time, Brad was instrumental in the design and creation of the Mobile Pantry vehicle. He even traveled to Chicago to pick it up. This project required innovative thinking to create such a groundbreaking and impactful vehicle. Four years ago, he transitioned into the Operations Manager role. His expertise in process development, plant layout and process flow as well as operations, business guidance and people leadership brought a unique set of skills to WAFER. Brad led the team through improvements to systems, logistics, inventory management, and program development. His professional experience and knowledge of WAFER proved to be invaluable as we navigated the pandemic, specifically with regards to changing distribution processes, and staff and volunteer safeguards.

Brad has a passion for serving people, and helping them develop and grow their God-given gifts and talents. This is what brought him to WAFER Food Pantry more than 7 years ago. Board members, staff, and volunteers extend deep gratitude to Brad for his leadership, and his dedication to WAFER's mission and the people served. His daily presence will be missed, but the lasting effects of his contribution will remain.

Best wishes to you, Brad, as you begin the next new adventures!



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Appreciating Volunteers

Friends,

Since the beginning of the year we have experienced consistent requests for food assistance. We hear the situation may change heading into summer as pandemic benefits begin to ease off or discontinue totally. The trend we are aware of is the return to more normal government commodity allocations resulting in increased food purchases. And, just like you are feeling the increased food costs, we are as well. In April, we were running low on canned vegetables. The best deal I could find was peas for .69/unit and carrots for .73/unit. The price for the peas was nearly double compared to the highest cost in the past, carrots were .18/unit more than the highest cost previously. One might think .18/unit isn't so bad, but considering we need 5000+ cans of vegetables monthly, the increase is considerable. We continue to shop around to spend wisely, but even the procurement process is much more difficult. Warehouses don't have the inventory they once had, in quantity or variety. We are doing our best, and thanks to your ongoing and faithful generosity we have funds to purchase foods in low supply to ensure each food package is complete.

Your generosity also provides the assurance our staff needs while actively seeking out areas where there is a high concentration of low-income people or expressed needs. For example, Mobile Pantry Manager, Tony, recently began distributing information about Mobile Pantry services to specific underserved areas such as a low-income housing complex he felt could benefit from a regular stop. In talking to the residents his suspicions were confirmed. After only a few months, this particular site has continued to grow to one of the top distribution sites. In addition, Tony learned of transportation barriers for families in a rural area of the county. These families were unable to get to the pantry or mobile pantry sites so Tony takes food to them. Volunteers and staff load up food for 9 families and drive to a central location near the families for pick up each month. These successes and impacts wouldn't happen without you!



I have been on the receiving end of *many* questions about the new facility. It is a slow and thorough process. We need to get every detail right on such an important project. I invite you to follow along with us on the journey as we share details, news, and big moments on the website under the "New Facility" tab and on Facebook at WAFER Food Pantry. On the theme of exciting news, I had the opportunity to apply for American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds that the City of La Crosse. Of all ARPA funds available, the City designated a portion solely to non-profits. Funds were requested for the freezer and cooler project in the new facility, and WAFER was awarded \$150,000! I was asked to join a press conference at City Hall when funding decisions were announced to the community. From left to right is Mayor Mitch Reynolds, Children's Museum Director Anne Snow, La Crosse Community Foundation Director Jamie Schloegel, and myself at the press conference. Additionally, funding through the Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection has been committed for \$70,000 for the project as well.



Each year I prepare an organizational "year in review" annual report. The report contains a summary of the previous year, impact statistics, financial reporting, programs and services overview, introduction to some rockstar volunteers and Board Members, and more. You can find the full report on the website, waferlacrosse.org, under the "About Us—Mission, Vision, History" tab.

Again, my most sincere thanks to you for your support of WAFER and the difference you make for 1000's of people struggling to put food on the table every month. Thank you for being a part of the solution for addressing hunger right here at home and providing hope for people who need it most.

In Service and Gratitude,



The WAFER Board of Directors developed a strategic and ambitious plan for the future 13 years ago! The last and most daunting part of that plan was to acquire a building to provide space to fulfill our mission, and meet the growing and changing needs of patrons. Sometimes just giving food is not enough.

In the new building, we will have space to teach people how to cook and help acquire tools needed for a functioning kitchen, opportunity to learn about other resources the community, and encounter people who care! We are thrilled to say the purchase of the building at the corner of Gillette and Rose St. fully meets our space needs and enables us to move out of our existing cramped and flood-prone location, and move to a facility designed to meet our needs to receive, store, repackage when needed, and distribute food! The building will accommodate our growing efforts to ensure every person in La Crosse who experiences food insecurity has access to appropriate, nutritious and good food. And, the move will take us from an industrial park and to being part of a neighborhood!

We are getting close to breaking ground for renovations, which will provide a welcoming, dignified space for those we serve and a fresh face to the Northside community. This project will be accomplished by our local communities, for everyone in our local communities! Please watch for future news and information on how you can help WAFER *Build Capacity, Hope and Dignity*.

Respectfully, Campaign Co-Chairs Madalene Buelow and Taylor Haley

Volunteer Appreciation Month

Volunteers serve in a variety of roles, probably many of which the general public is unaware of. There are “regular weekly” volunteers, people who typically serve on a specific day of the week. This creates opportunities for the volunteers to develop relationships with one another, and develop a familiar system of work. In addition to general distribution (see Deb below handing out the grocery bag), there are seemingly endless other roles. For example volunteers who represent WAFER at special events, programs, or community food drives. There are volunteers who provide administrative support such as registering patrons, stuffing envelopes, filing paperwork, and designing menus for delivery programs. Still others who fill in where needed like repacking projects (see Patti with the box of foods), special distribution events (such Sig, Al, and Dave [L to R] who load cars at the West Salem Saturday Food Fair), substituting for a driver on recovery routes, assembling senior food packages, delivering packages to homebound patrons, and of course just see to the day to day operational needs.



Every month, volunteers provide an average of 1000 hours of their time. This gift truly makes offering pantry services a possibility and collectively the impact is enormous. Thousands of families each month benefit from selfless acts of service. The worth of volunteer time is immeasurable, but Independent Sector values time at \$28.54 (for 2021) per one volunteer hour. Based on this rate, WAFER volunteers provide nearly \$350,000 in work annually. Even if volunteers were paid \$10 per hour, financial savings would be well over \$100,000. Instead, reallocating funds to direct service outputs is something WAFER stakeholders can get behind.

Volunteers are truly the backbone of WAFER and the reason that so many friends and neighbors have food to put on the table at mealtime. They work hard to get the food out the door, food provided by donors like you. And, while April was volunteer appreciation month, we are grateful for such amazing people who quietly give on a daily basis. “Thank you volunteers!” Our thanks isn’t enough for all you give, but it is heartfelt and sincere!



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Visit waferlacrosse.org to sign up and
receive a monthly e-newsletter.



WAFER is a Partner Agency with United Way and
Feeding America's Channel One Regional Food Bank.



Our Mission: Responding to God's love, WAFER provides food and works to eliminate hunger.

How You Can Help Now

VOLUNTEER | DONATE FOOD | DONATE ONLINE

Call, click or visit WAFER to volunteer and donate food.

Donate online at www.waferlacrosse.org and
use the PayPal link .

**If you would like to write a check to donate,
please use the envelope enclosed.**

Thank you!