Montgomery Area Food Bank

Operating in the Pandemic’s New Reality

Regardless of the officially determined onset of COVID-19 world and nationwide, for River Region residents this edition of Heart of Alabama covers the time period most impactful on our collective communities. From March through May, we’ve seen a virus in China become a Pandemic. As a result we’ve all dealt with the public health impact initially on our nation’s healthcare system, followed quickly by the economic impact resulting from physical distancing and a spike in unemployment.

As COVID-19 hit and we saw its impact gaining momentum across the nation, Montgomery Area Food Bank (MAFB) Management and Leadership teams quickly realized they would have to analyze the way we do virtually everything. Initially, they focused that analysis internally, because we recognize one of our greatest strengths is our ability to serve as a force multiplier for a network of Partner Distribution Organizations, agencies, kitchens and pantries throughout 35 of Alabama’s 67 counties.

MAFB Warehouse and Administrative staff execute the operational changes necessitated by COVID-19 virus transmission preventative guidelines. Nevertheless, distribution has gone up.

In order to adhere to Center of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines for curtailing the spread of the virus we modified everything from Receiving and Distribution to providing assistance through existing programs with increased attention to detail.

Emblematic of the extent of the changes were the changes made to how we provided much of that distribution. Prior to the advent of COVID-19 we operated a “Market Spot” where partner agencies were previously able to walk through and add to their pre-ordered provisions, before we assisted them with the loading of their vehicles and/or trailers.

In order to curtail the further spread of the coronavirus MAFB strictly managed foot traffic into our facilities, which ultimately translated to the elimination of access.

For many of us the end of the school year is an exciting time off when we look forward to care-free summer months, which are frequently only rivaled, by the excitement of returning to school to share what you’d done all summer.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 worldwide pandemic, which closed schools with little warning, put a crimp in the curriculum, as well as the opportunity for vital socialization of so many of our school-age children. However, for many the cost was much higher...without access to the school breakfast and lunch programs at school, many children went hungry.

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School Pantry Program’s Importance Emphasized

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Nevertheless, the agencies involved with the MAFB School Pantry Program (SSP) did their best to overcome such obstacles to provide nutrition to their adopted schools, before the USDA’s Summer Meals for Kids took over with their Annual Summer Feeding program. A searchable map to Summer Feeding locations can be found on the MAFB website at www.montgomeryareafoodbank.org/NeedHelp.html.

Many of the SSP agencies and schools collaborated to pre-box provisions in order to adhere to the latest safety guidance and conduct the distributions as “touchless” as possible. The SSP continues to be conducted as a pilot program with the focus on applying lessons learned.
By: Richard A Deem  
MAFB Chief Executive Officer  

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Whether you call it COVID-019 or the coronavirus, the resulting fallout of the immediate measures necessary to combat the virus – which created the current worldwide pandemic – have been far reaching and life changing.

For Montgomery Area Food Bank, the resulting impact has been more food insecure Alabamians – many more. Our mission of “Feeding Hope Across Alabama” has never been more important.

While the sheer numbers of our neighbors in need has grown exponentially, we have all had to overcome time-consuming, yet absolutely vital adherence to guidelines from the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Disaster relief has long been a part of our mission, but usually not our main, every day mission. So, even that facet of what we do has changed. We’re still actively involved with Emergency Management Agency planning and support, but disaster relief in the past was routinely preceded by elements of “All Clear” declarations, identified recovery goals and being able to confidently work within an environment which was declared safe.

One constant, which has served us well, has been our “business model” of being a force multiplier for our network of Partner Distribution Organizations, or smaller food banks, in Tuscaloosa, Auburn, Dothan and Selma and the resulting extended reach in support of food pantries, kitchens and local partner agencies. With a service area of 35 counties and a staff of less than 35 – our network structure has never been more important.

When this virus hit, people began to shelter in place, the natural reaction was to store supplies, suddenly challenging the supply chains of the nation’s retail grocery stores – many of which routinely commit to providing support to MAFB. The struggle to maintain supplies available within their stores, translates to us filling in the shortages created by purchasing more and more of the assistance we provide.

Nevertheless, our increased operational costs have not been passed along. Those in need are never charged when receiving assistance. And, our partner agencies have not been asked to share any of the spiked cost burden. You may well ask how that is possible. After all we’re a nonprofit!

To truly understand the answer you need only understand that food banking is arguably the purest form of “Community Building,” supported by philanthropy and individuals taking action. Another constant, which has served us well, has been the consistent compassion and heart displayed by so many of you who dig deep down within yourselves to not only ask “How can I help,” but follow through, step up and provide resources – the most valuable of which being your time.

Alas, the aspect of volunteering your time at MAFB, has been curtailed in deference to an abundance of caution. Much like food and fund drives, volunteering in close quarters is simply not conducive to maintaining CDC guidelines. Nevertheless, support has not waned. We have encouraged volunteers to support local community agencies, which routinely have older, more susceptible volunteers.

And then there are our retail grocery partners, local corporate supporters, communities and individuals who have found ways to step up – often unsolicited – to offset our skyrocketing costs. As a member of Feeding America network, corporate support provides a boost to our economies of scale throughout our 199 food bank network. However, much of the most personable and gratifying support has been generated locally. From local businesses and leaders who prefer anonymity to individuals who share whatever they’re able, your support not only offsets costs, but inspires and reenergizes.

We have centralized valuable information on receiving assistance, the latest guidelines and even how to donate on our web site at www.MontgomeryAreaFoodBank.org.

Right now, we have an opportunity to personalize a brick, which will be placed in the walkway leading up to our new E. Parke Hinman, III Building. It’s a way to help and receive a more permanent form of recognition.

Montgomery Area Food Bank, Inc. Newsletter - The Heart of Alabama: Montgomery Area Food Bank (MAFB) is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization, devoted to combating hunger and food insecurity in the state of Alabama. We connect low-income, at-risk Alabamians with food and resources to satisfy emergent hunger needs, as well as educational material targeting healthier outcomes and self-sufficiency. We are a member of the national network of food banks, Feeding America®. The Heart of Alabama is an OPT-IN, subscription publication. If you decide to OPT-OUT, just let us know via email, phone, or letter. It is possible you will receive a final edition - depending upon when you opt out and our publication date.

Richard A. Deem  
Bobby Brown  
David Fata  
Al Bloom  

Feeding Hope Across Alabama  

MAFB Warehouse Worker, Willie “MAC” McQueen double checks his paperwork while pulling provisions for pick up by partner agencies.
Celebrating Volunteer Month (April)

2020 Volunteer of the Year
Ms. Kathleen “Kathy” Burr is the Montgomery Area Food Bank (MAFB) Volunteer of the Year. Kathy has amassed more than 115 volunteer hours during more than 5 years of volunteering at MAFB.

Her upbeat demeanor is contagious. Regardless of the task, she welcomes each experience as a chance to thank and motivate fellow volunteers.

Kathy’s actions convey the genuine concern and importance she places in being able to help so many others in need of assistance. When greeting a new volunteer Kathy was heard saying, “Since MAFB is a non-profit every dollar is accountable. Volunteers like us free up money to spend on assistance rather than additional staff.”

Kathy truly enjoys volunteering. It’s obvious it makes her feel that she is making a real difference in the community one family at a time. Kathy added, “They don’t see us, but based on the volume of food that is distributed, I know every bit helps.”

Kathy’s combination of enthusiasm, awareness of the impact of volunteering and compassion translates to a makeup of an outstanding ambassador of Montgomery Area Food Bank. “Volunteering is giving back to the community. It’s paying it forward.”

2020 Group Volunteer of the Year
Publix Super Markets is 2020 Group Montgomery Area Food Bank Volunteer(s) of the Year! Publix Super Markets and Publix Super Markets Charities have created a work environment of corporate responsibility while leading by example, which has permeated the entire organization. Publix has been recognized as a Visionary Partner of Feeding America® for food donations made through our in-store perishable recovery program. Publix Leadership has also donated $5 million to Feeding America network food banks the last two years in succession (the first of which was announced in the MAFB Hugh K. Rule, Jr. Building. Recently they donated $1 million at the outset of the Coronavirus pandemic and then weeks later another $1 Million.

But wait – there’s more! Publix Leadership sets the example by sponsoring two separate annual Food & Fund raisers for Feeding America food banks, as well as annual grants which have enriched MAFB year after year.

So, when it comes to volunteering, naturally Publix has a program their associates jump at – “Publix Serves”. Throughout their service area Publix Serves Day is conducted once a year since 2015 as a way of bringing our service mission to life. It’s a company-wide commitment to help communities grow and thrive.

Locally, Publix Serves is held twice a year! From sorting cereal and processing produce to packing frozen meat boxes Publix volunteers racked up an equivalent to 130 volunteer hours. That’s a lot of sorting!

2020 Senior Volunteer of the Year
Mr. William “Bill” F. Furr is the Montgomery Area Food Bank (MAFB) 2020 Senior Volunteer of the Year. A retired Air Force Lieutenant Colonel, Bill brought a skill set to MAFB borne of more than two decades of experience in auditing, logistics and doctrine development, as well as a master’s degree in Logistics Management from the Air Force Institute of Technology.

With three years of volunteering three days a week under his belt, Bill’s enthusiastic willingness to come in additional days whenever needed, has resulted in him bringing the same infectious attitude of accomplishment to MAFB volunteering. A quick study and accomplished leader, Bill excels when teaching process and procedures to new volunteers, especially when the MAFB Volunteer Center has multiple projects going on at the same time.

His dedication and commitment to the MAFB mission of combating hunger goes beyond the walls of MAFB. Bill also finds time and energy to volunteer to help Montgomery Area Council on Aging (Meals on Wheels) achieve their mission.

According to Bill, he volunteers for the physical and mental stimulation, a chance to interact with other people, to have a consistent weekly routine and the comradeship of other regular volunteers. He says it gives him something to look forward to each week. He feels a sense of well-being and satisfaction of knowing he is helping others.

We are fortunate Bill is able to derive so much from volunteering. However, while he may feel he is the one benefiting we know that it is the MAFB mission which benefits most from his compassion and energetic commitment. Thank you Bill, You are our Senior Volunteer of the Year.
to the “Market Spot” entirely. This change meant agencies could only make pre-orders and our staff would pull, prepackage, double-check and stage (in coolers when appropriate) everything beforehand. We eliminated parking in front of an administrative building and used forklifts and personnel to deliver ordered provisions with limited individual interaction in hourly intervals. It was during this same timeframe that our nation’s supply lines were straining to keep up with demand. As a result, many of the same retail grocers we rely on for donate food for much of our inventory, were struggling to fill their own shelves. As a nonprofit, MAFB found ourselves contacting many of same suppliers and occasionally purchasing essentials depending upon availability.

As a force multiplier, MAFB’s role is to facilitate outreach programs by sharing the economies of scale generated by our membership in the Feeding America® network of food banks, as well as national corporate agreements executed locally, and of course the support of our community.

Looking at dramatic increases in demand as well as costs, it may have been justifiable in a business sense to share those costs. However, MAFB chose to aggressively attack the dramatic need and further bolster our greatest strength. Instead, MAFB cut shared handling fees by more than half. As a result, the volume of assistance saw an accelerated throughput. The result: Our agencies were providing much more assistance directly to their neighbors in need.

As stated previously, one of our greatest strengths is our ability to serve as a force multiplier for our network of community agencies, kitchens and pantries. However, that strength is reliant upon the professionalism of our staff of 34. We supported one elderly, susceptible driver’s decision to retire and shelter in place at the outset of the virus spreading across the nation. And during this time frame some staff were able to work remotely periodically. Our staff’s dedication and buy-in to our mission translated to totally reworking internal processes, which had previously resulted in a new Fiscal Year Annual Distribution high-water mark of 27.9 million pounds being distributed in FY2019. They made changes to a proven process, and actually increased distribution! They were able to make sweeping changes while not only maintaining our distribution levels, but during the month of April, we actually increased distribution by more than 200,000 pounds of assistance. They continue to accomplish this drive, while strictly adhering to CDC guidelines and despite dealing with the same fears and concerns for family and self that we all share during what has correctly been described so many times as unprecedented times.

Moving forward MAFB recognizes our mission will continue to grow to equally unprecedented heights. The estimated number of food insecure Alabamians in our service area PRIOR to COVID-19 was slightly more than 300,000. However, during a recent six-week period Alabama exceeded 400,000 new unemployment claims throughout the state. Unfortunately, the impact will result in food insecurity growing exponentially.

Nevertheless, we are confident in our ability to live up to our mission of “Feeding Hope Across Alabama”. Our confidence is buoyed by one additional strength…the support of our community. All of our accomplishments and growth in combating hunger in Alabama have been facilitated by the generous and continued support of our community. We named our newsletter the “Heart of Alabama” in tribute to how the River Region and Alabamians throughout our service area open their hearts when they know there’s a neighbor in need. Your support fuels us. It sustains us during unprecedented times. MAFB drivers carefully unload a Mobile Pantry distribution delivery of two full 53’ trailers - between 10 and 14 tons, while donning full Personal Protection Equipment (top). In another effort to “flatten the curve” of COVID-19 transmission, MAFB radically changed partner agency support by eliminating the ‘Market Spot’ and conducting delivery of pre-boxed, pre-ordered provisions (near above) outside in an attempt to make the process as ‘touchless’ as possible and adhere to CDC guidelines.
The ‘Heart of Alabama’ Shows We’re #TogetherAlabama

As part of Publix Super Markets Charities’ ongoing support of hunger relief efforts and to help communities in our area during the coronavirus pandemic, Publix Charities announced on two separate occasions it had donated $1 million to Feeding America® member food banks across the Southeast for a total of $2 million.

“I want to thank Publix Super Markets Charities for this generous donation,” said Publix CEO Todd Jones. “During these unprecedented times that have affected nearly every aspect of our day-to-day lives, many people may not know where their next meal is coming from. This donation will provide assistance to those impacted and help continue the work that Publix, Publix Charities and Feeding America do every day to alleviate hunger in the communities we serve.” Montgomery Area Food Bank - $40,000. THANK YOU PUBLIX!

Thankfully, we have SABIC Innovative Plastic’s facility right here in Burkville, Alabama, because the SABIC Corporation sent us a $50,000 grant to help their neighbors in need during the Coronavirus pandemic! SABIC Innovative Plastics manufactures the Lexan polycarbonate typically used by the automotive, electronics, and aerospace industries. Thank you, neighbor! @sabiccorp

If you’ve followed our social media posts, you know Valley Bank has a long-term commitment to supporting our mission. They have become a part of our Hunger Action Month, presenting the results of an annual month-long Food & Fund Drive right before associates work a volunteer project. However, we were pleasantly surprised when we received an unsolicited letter from Valley Bank. “Valley’s commitment to you and our communities is steadfast and we understand the immediate need in the areas we serve,” said Delpha Bartley-Jones, Vice President, Regional CRA Officer-Alabama, Corporate Social Responsibility in the letter informing MAFB of an impending $15,000 check. “In that vein we are prioritizing some of the urgent and critical needs and are dedicating funds to food banks across the bank’s footprint.”

Saturday May 9 WSFA12 News aired an evening concert which brought together some big Alabama acts to help benefit the Montgomery Area Food Bank!

“Alabama Strong” showcased the likes of Ruben Studdard, Taylor Hicks, Clinton Babers, Walker Burroughs, Sara Evans and Alvin Garrett. There were also guest appearances by Bo Jackson, Rickey Smiley and Roy Wood, Jr.

WSFA 12 News partnered with The Vance Law Firm through the #TogetherAlabama campaign. Viewers were encouraged to donate generously to the Montgomery Area Food Bank to help those who find themselves food insecure during the COVID 19 crisis.

The list of artists who performed on Alabama Strong included; Clinton Babers; Walker Burroughs; Sara Evans; Alvin Garrett; Taylor Hicks; Ruben Studdard. The Go Fund Me page is still active: https://www.gofundme.com/f/TogetherAlabama.

We were able to shake off the Monday Blues this week, when we found out the good people at Spire Energy @spireenergy #spireenergy made a very generous $4,700 donation to bolster our mission and provide assistance to neighbors in need – especially those impacted by the COVID-19 epidemic. Thank you SPIRE ENERGY!

When we think food bank operations, almost everybody’s focus is of course...food. But from trucking, cold storage, forklifts personnel and utilities there are many costs you might overlook.

One of those costs is boxes! Boxes to store provisions, boxes to transport provisions and boxes to provide to our neighbors in need - which are frequently the most difficult to get, since we usually operate in bulk.

Fortunately, our friends at International Paper know this. They stepped up with a donation so large it took two shipments! International Paper donated a grand total of 5,000 of these boxes, which translated to more than 20 pallets.

Thank you to International Paper...we will use every single one of them!
The Heart of Alabama
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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Adopting New COVID-19 Safety Procedures