

# hungermatters

WINTER 2022

## Leslie's Lived Experience: "There is No Stigma to Eating"

It was 1990 and newly divorced, single mother Leslie left an abusive relationship with two little girls in hand but nothing else. She had no money, left behind a great career, the beautiful home she had built, and her family and friends since high school — her whole life history, left behind, to keep herself and her children safe.

Although that dangerous situation was behind her, her little family faced another hardship: hunger. "It is humiliating to know you have no choice but to ask for help — especially when your family were givers. But when you are there, you just bite your tongue, lower your head, and do it," Leslie says now, reflecting back on that time. However, it was the holiday season and with so many expenses of moving to a new state, she found herself needing to ask for help. So, that is what Leslie did. She reached out to her nearest food bank and got what she needed for herself and children.

Once Leslie got a job and was able to get the girls settled into a new normal, the family began volunteering regularly at their food bank.

*"I want others to know that having a place to get a box of food — and a turkey for Thanksgiving! — with smiles, hugs, and no judgment made such a difference. Even after I no longer needed help, I am still helping others receive the help and encouragement that was given to me."*

Leslie wants to encourage people who need the help to go and get it — and encourage folks to give if they can.

As the COVID-19 pandemic impacted another holiday season, Leslie's own experience had her thinking of how families must feel, especially those who have lost income and need the extra help. "All these families who had to make the choice to ask for help this year in light of losing their income during COVID-19, need to know this: **There is no stigma to eating!**" Leslie says of asking for help. Leslie feels fortunate to now be in a position to help others, by making a monthly donation to the Food Bank of Central & Eastern North Carolina.

Due to the devastating impact of COVID-19, the Food Bank's partner agencies reported a staggering 35% increase in need over pre-pandemic levels and nearly 600,000 people didn't always know where their next meal would come from. A lot of those people had also never faced hunger before.

Your support during these challenging times means that families like Leslie's won't have to make hard choices between paying for food or other necessities. Learn more about how you can give back through a donation or volunteering at [foodbankcenc.org](http://foodbankcenc.org).



# From the President & CEO

Dear Friends,

For the last two years, uncertainty has been a constant at the Food Bank. As the COVID-19 variants loom, we worry how they will impact the health and well-being of those we serve, our partner agencies, and our staff. Supply chain issues continue to delay our purchase of food and other items necessary to our work. Rising costs are impacting our budgets, but more importantly, are causing even more strain on those we serve.

We know these are issues that are facing everyone and that many of you reading this letter have or continue to feel the same strain. And at the same time, we know we can count on your belief in our mission.

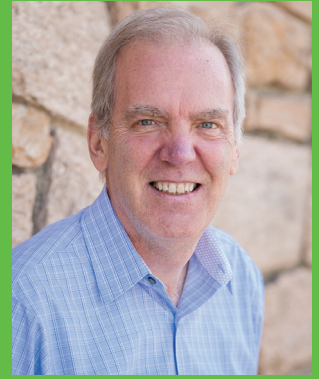
Your support has allowed us to nourish more people these last few years as well as continue our work of building solutions to end hunger. We've been able to move into a larger building in New Bern that will greatly expand our capacity to serve the surrounding area. We created a pilot program to further our outreach to the Latinx community by providing our agencies with boxes of food that are culturally meaningful. We distributed nearly 50 million pounds of food in the last six months.

Families like Leslie's count on us to be there when times get tough. Thanks to your generosity, Leslie was certain she could feed her children. Thanks to you, thousands of our friends and neighbors can count on that too.

With sincere thanks,



Peter Werbicki, President & CEO



## Earline Middleton, Food Bank Vice President, Retires after 32-year Career

Vice President of Partner Services & Public Policy, Earline Middleton, retired in January following 32 years of service to the Food Bank.

Earline started at the Food Bank in 1991 as the Assistant to the Resource Development Director. She's held many roles over the years, becoming a public face for the Food Bank, and shattered glass ceilings when she became our first female VP and first VP of color.

During her career, Earline has played a vital role in the implementation of anti-hunger and anti-poverty legislation. She has testified before the USDA, a congressional workshop, and hosted North Carolina Congressional delegations.

"It has been an honor and privilege to work at the Food Bank," said Earline. It hasn't always been smooth or easy, but the work we carried and the battles we fought have been to provide better access and more nutritious food for the too many people in need. A lot of minds and policies have been changed along these 32 years and for that I am thankful."

Under Earline's leadership, her team greatly expanded the capacity of the Food Bank's partner agencies. They launched two new child nutrition programs – Kids Cafe and Kids Summer Meals. Most recently, Earline and her team advocated for the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP).

"It's hard to put into words how grateful we are to Earline for her unwavering and dedicated work to enrich the lives of individuals and families at risk for hunger," said Peter Werbicki, President & CEO of the Food Bank. "We are extremely proud of her accomplishments and while her contributions will be missed, we wish her the best in her retirement."





# Culturally Meaningful Food Empowers Communities

Over the last few years, the Food Bank has taken action to educate ourselves and step up our partnerships with organizations that work to empower systemically marginalized groups. This includes programs to reach Latinx and Indigenous communities, more Spanish-speaking staff, translated website and documents, and sourcing and distributing more culturally meaningful foods.

The most recent step toward distributing this food is a partnership with nine Wake County agencies who will receive boxes of nonperishable food that are culturally meaningful to the Latinx community. About 450 boxes are provided each month and include items such as canned chicken, canned beans and corn, tortillas, rice, and cereal.

Tri-Area Ministry food pantry in Wake Forest is one of the agencies who are seeing the benefits of distributing more culturally meaningful foods.

“Despite providing services in a geographic area which has a sizeable Hispanic population, we traditionally haven’t fed a large number of Latino families. We attribute this, in part, to not having a consistent supply of culturally appropriate food,” said Michael Burger, Board Chairman at Tri-Area Ministry. “Through our partnership with the Food Bank, we are now able to offer a variety of food items which are more desirable. Our clients are appreciative of our efforts to provide them with foods which are familiar. ”

We continue to learn and implement ways to make the Food Bank more accessible. Our website is now available in Spanish, including our Food Finder – [foodbankcenc.org/comida](http://foodbankcenc.org/comida).



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# New Bern Branch Moves to Larger Facility

In Fall 2021, our New Bern Branch moved from its original location, a 6,500 square foot facility, to a 26,000 square foot facility at 1702 Red Robin Lane. The impacts of Hurricanes Matthew and Florence, and now the COVID-19 pandemic, have caused distribution in the eastern part of our service area to soar over the last five years. This often forced operations to run out of two smaller facilities, stretching our resources beyond their limits. This new facility will allow us to distribute more food, especially perishable product like produce and frozen meats. There is also more space for loading trucks, receiving deliveries, and for volunteer projects. We look forward to making a bigger impact in our eastern communities!



## In Memoriam

Mr. Ron Doggett, who along with his wife Jeanette, were unwavering supporters of the Food Bank's mission, passed away October 4, 2021. In 1994, Ron became the Chairman of the steering committee for the Food Bank's very first Capital Campaign to purchase the Food Bank a new building, and in 2012 the Food Bank selected Mr. and Mrs. Doggett as the first recipients of its prestigious Hunt-Morgridge award in honor of their service to the community. In 2017, we named the Operations Center at the Food Bank's new hunger relief facility after the Doggetts and were so thankful to have Ron present for the naming. The Doggetts played a key role in the Food Bank's ability to fight hunger in our 34-county service area. Join us in holding Ron's family in our hearts during this difficult time.



John "Johnny" Burns, inaugural member of our Sandhills Branch regional council, passed away October 24, 2021. Johnny was raised in Aberdeen, NC and spent his life giving back to his community. He was a long-time member of the Kiwanis Club of the Sandhills and chartered the Aberdeen Jaycees chapter. Johnny also served on the Moore County Board of Education and chaired the Aberdeen Beautification Committee. He joined the Sandhills Food Bank's first regional council and with a group of fellow community volunteers, helped bolster donations and establish events to benefit the Food Bank. We're so grateful to Johnny for all his years of service.

