



## Kolasa: Food bank marks its 10th anniversary

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The Pitt Memorial Hospital Foundation held its annual Community Benefits & Health Initiatives Fair recently. I marveled at the enthusiasm of the grantees for their important ideas to solve local health issues. Many of the programs are designed to help families Eat Smart and Move More to prevent childhood obesity or help individuals manage their obesity.

We are so fortunate to have leadership at the Pitt Memorial Hospital Foundation that lets our community identify its needs and develop a local response. Since September is "Hunger Action" month, I would like to tell you about one program that has received funding over the years for its fresh produce program — the Food Bank of Central & Eastern North Carolina.

The bank is celebrating its 10-year anniversary of responding to disasters in eastern North Carolina.

In the early 1970s, as a graduate student at the University of Tennessee, I first observed hunger as we did research about food habits and nutritional status of people living in East Tennessee. Then, later that decade as a young faculty member at Michigan State University, I witnessed hunger in the inner city of Detroit as well as rural areas of the Upper Peninsula. I taught my students about hunger in America and we worked, wrote papers, testified at hunger hearings and generally created public awareness about what we thought was an unthinkable situation — that people in America went without appropriate nourishment.

We were so confident in those days that as a nation we would stamp out hunger and stamp it out quickly. And here it is, 30 years later, and there are adults and children that still experience what we now term as "food insecurity."

Fortunately, there are organizations, like the food bank, an affiliate of Feeding America, that respond to both national disasters and major weather events within the 34 counties of eastern North Carolina. We have been reminded that Hurricane Floyd devastated much of eastern North Carolina in 1999. The food bank distributed more than 5 million pounds of food and non-food essentials to victims of Floyd from its Raleigh warehouse. The opening of the warehouse in Greenville in 1999 was expedited.

Some of you will remember that thousands of volunteers logged more than 31,000 hours helping to pick up, load, sort, box and distribute food and emergency supplies in the weeks after the storm. The food bank continues to work in that manner. It serves as a conduit for accepting, sorting, packaging, storing and distributing food to partner agencies. I am sure many of you have donated money or food to the Food Bank. And, unfortunately, the need is as great as ever.

Over the last several years I have had the opportunity to visit with Larry Motteler, the Greenville branch operations manager. He told me that, over the last 10 years, the Greenville branch has provided more than 42 million meals to children, families, the elderly and those who are simply having a rough time. Larry speaks with genuine pride in the work that he, other staff and the huge number of volunteers do to make sure donations to the food bank go right out to those who need it locally.

The Greenville branch serves Carteret, Craven, Greene, Jones, Lenoir, Onslow, Pamlico, Pitt and, together with the Raleigh branch, Edgecombe and Wilson counties. The food bank works with agencies that provide food to individuals and families. Last year, more than 7.3 million pounds of food were distributed to 153 partnering agencies.

I am told that for every dollar donated the Food Bank can provide \$8 of food or four meals. In the 10 counties served by the Food Bank of Central & Eastern North Carolina at Greenville, 105,552 individuals are at risk of hunger. Almost 39,000 are children who need to eat healthy to be healthy, to perform academically and fulfill

their promise.

Join me in celebrating the food bank's anniversary. Volunteer time at their warehouse at 497 W. Ninth St. Call 752-4996, ext. 2302, to sign up or go online at [www.foodbankcenc.org](http://www.foodbankcenc.org) to learn more about the bank's operations, including its mobile pantry. Read how others have helped and consider what you and your family or your school or church might do.

My own family was inspired by the story of a young boy who asked guests to his birthday party to bring a can of food instead of a present. So, on my husband's birthday, we did the same and were overwhelmed by the positive response of our friends. By the way, the guests still brought the old codger gag gifts.

Happy anniversary, Food Bank of Central & Eastern Carolina! I wish we didn't need you, but since the people of eastern North Carolina do, I am very glad you are there.

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