

Solving hunger one meal at a time

by Peter Schwartzman & Bruce Weik

Note: This is the final piece of a three part article on hunger and food; the previous two articles appeared in the last two issues of *The Zephyr*.

We firmly established that there is a brewing global hunger problem. We also provided ample evidence to suggest that a local hunger and malnutrition problem exists as well. Our local problem is not one specific to Galesburg, but is likely to be more serious than other Illinois communities because of our high unemployment and poverty rates. Additionally, and critically, our problem didn't start with the current recession/depression nor will it end magically if our economy improves. Under these circumstances, we should be compelled to seek solutions rather than merely acknowledge problems. So, let's get on with it.

Our efforts to date have led us to propose the following efforts as solutions to the hunger and malnourishment that surrounds us. These suggestions are by no means exhaustive of the possibilities available to us but they will hopefully start the conversation and, more importantly, get people moving in a positive direction. Our recommendations include:

Promote and publicize where hungry people can get food. There are many organizations that are providing food to our neighbors in need (see chart). Most provide food for pickup but not meals. As such, people have to be able to get to the locations, at the times they are open. Thus, hungry people need access to transportation, a stove/oven and even a refrigerator. We have heard that these appliances are not always available in rentals, or under more severe conditions, the power has been turned off. Add to these problems the fact that not everyone knows how to (or has the time to) cook, and it is not hard to understand why many children do without. This makes hunger a bigger problem than food pantries can solve alone. Other methods and resources need to be made available.

Create new venues where people can be fed or obtain food. There are not many places where hungry people can get a free meal on a regular basis. And among those few places that do provide such a meal, rarely are there not stipulations (i.e., religious commitments, declaration of need) in receiving food. This can be a problem for any number of reasons. If a person is hungry, they need food. Thus, it is important that we create new venues for providing free meals, especially during the holiday season and the summer when many children may not have access to school food. We are going to try to demonstrate this by providing a free Holiday Dinner to be held next Tuesday (December 22) from 5-8 p.m. at the Galesburg Community Center (150 E. Simmons). Everyone in Galesburg and the surrounding area is welcome to attend. We are asking that anyone who can also bring canned goods to be donated to local pantries. We are expecting to feed at least one-hundred people, so feel free to spread the word. We anticipate this being the first of many such events as we work towards getting food to more people. If you know of locations that could be used for such activities, please let us know. We are also looking into serving meals at various outdoor sites, weather permitting, using a concept similar to Food Not Bombs, or Food Not Lawns.

Grow food on our lawns and open lots. Almost every house and most apartments have a place where food can be grown. In an effort to feed ourselves, we need to increase our production of food on the local level. As we have discovered, the city has a lot of empty lots that neighborhoods can use for

garden space. If this sounds like a good idea, contact your council person as there is an effort to get this accomplished. This summer, Galesburg had at least six neighborhood gardens growing food motivated by a people working out of The Center. Several of these produced quite a bit of food. In 2010, we are planning even bigger efforts. Thus, largely uncelebrated, there are efforts afoot. Yet, in order to grow food, we may have to change ordinances so food can be grown on front as well as back lawns. We might also need to organize new collection and distribution centers in order to move all the food that will be produced, as soon as this coming summer.

Retrieve, store, and redistribute edible food that is currently discarded as waste. Though many have claimed that this cannot be done either because of legal liabilities or that there isn't enough food to obtain this way, these beliefs are simply not true. First of all, there are laws that protect organizations that provide free food to people. The two most important ones are: (1) the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act, signed into law in 1996, which protects donors of food from civil and criminal liability when given in "good faith" to non-profit organizations; and, (2) the Good Samaritan Hunger Relief Act, signed into law in 2006, encourages food donations from businesses by providing tax deductions for donations made to food banks or shelters. Second, there is a ton of edible food being thrown out each day in Galesburg. This is not to say that most people or businesses are deliberately disposing of edible food. Rather, the financial (or other) incentives, the lack of knowledge of the above laws, and the absence of a system which would organize and oversee the retrieval, storage, and redistribution of this food results in large amounts of food being thrown away. Based on our preliminary investigation, we suspect most of the edible food is being trashed by fast food restaurants and large grocery stores (in compactors). But as long as there are hungry people, we should feel an obligation to use this food. Thus, we need to find ways to collect, store, and get this food to hungry people. With the help of four Knox students who worked on a hunger project in the fall term (Samir Bakhshi, Brett Daley, and Brent Newman, and Abby Pardick), we have learned about and begun contact with a food retrieval organization in Indianapolis, called Food Recovery. It is possible that we can become a local chapter of their organization.

Support local food producers. There are several opportunities for us to buy local food and, therefore, keep our food dollars in our community. Over the past few years, several Community Supported Agriculture organizations (CSA's) have formed. CSA's generally allow people to purchase fresh, locally grown, and often organic vegetables and fruits on a weekly or seasonal basis; visit <localharvest.org> to find out more about them. The Farmers' Market held in downtown Galesburg, from early May to late October, is also a great place to get fresh produce from local farmers. Also, thanks to efforts by a few caring citizens, low income people can now use their Link cards to buy food at the Market as well. When we buy locally grown food, we are supporting our community in so many ways (largely because these dollars recirculate and help many other businesses) and we are doing right by the environment as well; consider that most produce now travels on average 1,500 miles (from field to plate) in the United States.

Educate, educate, educate. We definitely need to get over the stigma that being hungry is something that people should be ashamed of. Hungry people deserve



to be fed. Period. Given that Galesburg is surrounded by the best soils in the world, there definitely shouldn't be anyone hungry here. Many people that we have spoken to are surprised that there are hungry people in our midst. Some even expressed that hungry people are hungry due to fault of their own. We definitely don't agree with this sentiment. We ask, how could a child be hungry (or malnourished) because of something he/she did wrong? It is our moral obligation to make sure that people have access to affordable, healthy, and nutritious

food. If you want to get involved in any of the above initiatives, please let us know (email: <thepeopleingalesburg@gmail.com>; phone: 309-344-0046). Let's not just sit around and grumble. As you can see, there are lots of opportunities to get involved. Let's get moving! Come to the free Community Holiday Dinner on December 22 or attend the next Hunger Action Group on Tuesday, January 12th, 7pm, at The Center. It's time to make our own future, one meal at a time.

Local Food Pantries

There are many organizations in Galesburg that exist to provide food to hungry people. The following organizations are ones that were provided online at www.feedingillinois.org.



FISH of Galesburg
688 Hawthorne Ct
Galesburg, IL 61401
Contact: Bob Robinson
Phone: (309) 341-2845
Hours: Mon-Fri, 10 am–3 pm

Galesburg Second Baptist
395 S. Cherry St.
Galesburg, IL 61401
Contact: Johnnie Trammell
Phone: (309) 342-3001
Hours: Wed, 1 pm–3 pm

Galesburg Rescue Mission
425 E. 3rd St.
Galesburg, IL 61401
Contact: Dave Scholl
Phone: (309) 343-4151
Hours: Mon-Fri, 9 am–4 pm

La Grace Hall of Hope
595 N. Cedar
Galesburg, IL 61401
Contact: Sandra Miller
Phone: (309) 368-3416
Hours: As needed

Galesburg Salvation Army
320 N. Kellogg St.
Galesburg, IL 61401
Contact: Rick Ray
Phone: (309) 342-9168
Hours: Mon-Fri, 10 am–Noon

St. Vincent de Paul
1229 N. Broad
Galesburg, IL 61401
Contact: Willa Jebbemeyer
Phone: (309) 353-5045
Hours: Wed, Noon–2 pm

Note: List was compiled by S. Bakhshi, B. Daley, B. Newman, & A. Pardick.