



Food For Thought Regional Food Bank of Northeastern NY

Executive Director - Mark Quandt

Success Magazine: Mark, will you share with our readers the function of the Regional Food Bank of NENY?

Mark Quandt: The Regional Food Bank works to alleviate hunger and prevent the waste of good food. The food bank collects large donations of food from all segments of the food industry—food that is perfectly good to eat but cannot be sold—and provides that food to organizations feeding hungry and disadvantaged people.

SM: Whom do you distribute your food to?

MQ: We distribute food to food pantries, soup kitchens, homeless shelters, day care centers, and programs serving children, the elderly, the disabled, and people suffering from addictions and other problems. We provide food assistance to over 1,000 agencies in twenty-three counties of northeastern New York, from the Canadian border in the north to the New Jersey/Pennsylvania border in the south.

SM: How do you obtain funding for your organization?

MQ: We have a diverse funding base. We are a private, non-profit organization, so most of our funding comes from contributions and fundraising activities. A portion of our funding comes from a small handling fee we charge for the food we distribute (\$.16 per pound), and we also receive an administrative fee for two programs we administer for the state. We even raise some money by renting some of our freezer space and leasing a maintenance garage on our property to a landscaping company. Our diverse funding base helps provide financial stability to the food bank.

SM: Colin DeMers of the Century House has been supporting your organization in a unique way. How have they worked with you?

MQ: The Century House has been a strong supporter of the food bank for many years, with both financial and in-kind contributions. They have now embarked on a unique project that is already raising a substantial amount of money and helping raise awareness of the food bank and the problem of hunger at the same time. The theme of the program is "Enjoy One, Share One," where for every meal a person enjoys at

the Century House, the Century House will make a donation to enable the food bank to provide a meal in that person's honor. The program even includes banquets and meals at other special events. They promote it very well at the Century House and their staff is totally committed to it, so customers are definitely aware of the program. Some have even made additional donations asking the Century House to forward them to the food bank. To top it all off, they have created a Book of Giving where people can share their thoughts and comments about the program, the food bank, or the issue of hunger in general. It is a wonderful program, and the food bank is proud to be part of it.

SM: How can others help contribute to your organization?

MQ: People can contribute their time, talent, or treasure. Thousands of people volunteer at the food bank, helping sort and repack donated products in our warehouse, assisting with office tasks, and participating in our many fundraising events. People can also help with special projects and needs of the food bank if they have unique skills they would like to contribute. Finally, as I mentioned previously, the food bank depends heavily on contributions from the community to fund its operations, so financial support through straight donations or participation in fundraising events is very important to us (and in the case of our events, a lot of fun for the donor).

SM: How has the recession affected your organization?

MQ: The recession has dramatically increased the need in the community. Food pantries are regularly serving 20% - 30% more people this year, and that's on top of a significant increase in 2008. Fortunately, we have been able to increase our food donations and distribution to meet more of the need. So far, people have continued to be generous to the food bank through the economic downturn. We hope it continues, because the need will remain strong for a long time.

SM: The Century house is planning a dinner fundraiser in November with Success Magazine as sponsors. How can other companies help to support your efforts?

MQ: Companies can support fundraising events like the dinner Success Magazine is sponsoring, make general donations separate from events, provide volunteer groups to work in our warehouse (many businesses do that on a regular basis or occasionally and love it—it seems to add to their team morale), organize a company food drive, and in some cases provide in-kind support. For example, a box company donates boxes, a law firm provides legal services, and several companies have donated equipment and other services. Companies can even create their own unique way to support the food bank, as the Century House has.

SM: What are your plans for the future of your organization?

MQ: First and foremost, we plan to remain true to our mission of acquiring as much donated food and other grocery product as possible and providing that product to our member agencies so they can better serve the hungry and disadvantaged people who turn to them for help. With that as our base and focus, we plan to improve our services by increasing the number of direct deliveries to our member agencies; provide training to help agencies use the food bank more effectively, improve their own operations, and raise more money and food themselves; expand operations at the Patroon Land Farm we manage to grow more of our own food; and expand other programs we administer as opportunities arise.

