

Food Pantry LAX



Summer 2023

Covid Ebbs but Hunger Surges



grams put in place during the pandemic to help people economically have now been expiring—certain tax breaks, extra food stamps, moratoriums on evictions and rent increases. For instance, CalFresh (food stamp) benefits, which had been boosted during the pandemic, went back to their pre-pandemic levels at the end of March.

“They were cut nearly in half,” Ramon Ramirez of Inglewood said about his CalFresh benefits, which had been about \$200 a month during the pandemic. He now comes to the pantry every week instead of every three weeks. “It helps a lot,” he said.

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Francisca Contreras showed up at Food Pantry LAX for the first time ever on a Tuesday in June.

“I’m struggling,” she said, explaining that the pandemic led to a sharp reduction in her work cleaning houses, from which she has not recovered.

“Before the pandemic, I had three houses,” she said. But now she has only one and works only one day a week, while hopeful she can find additional work.

The Covid pandemic is largely over, but its effects linger on when it comes to people needing food assistance. In fact, contrary to what might be expected, the ebbing of the pandemic appears to be leading

to an *increase* in the need for food support.

At Food Pantry LAX, customer traffic is now at its highest level since the early days of the pandemic lockdown. In May, the pantry gave out 16 percent more food than it did in January, and over 50 percent more than it distributed in May, 2022.

“The hunger crisis is now,” said Genevieve Riutort, president of the Westside Food Bank, a large charity that provides Food Pantry LAX and dozens of other smaller nonprofits with food to distribute to consumers. “It’s not over. The end of the Covid crisis was not the end of the hunger crisis.”

One reason for this is that pro-



Francisca Contreras

Peter Rood's Legacy

Food Pantry LAX lost one of its great champions when the Reverend Peter H. Rood Jr., the former rector at Holy Nativity Episcopal Church, passed away in April during heart surgery. He was 67.

Father Peter, who led Holy Nativity from 2002 until 2019, turned part of the lawn at the Westchester church into a community garden, which continues to provide fresh fruit and vegetables to the customers of the pantry.

"Feeding people was a huge thing for him," said Joanne Poyourow, a Westchester resident who started the garden with Father Peter and ran it for 11 years.

The two of them had started a group called Environmental Change-Makers in 2005, to encourage sustainable lifestyles, and began discussing urban farming. At one point, she recalled, the church's vestry went away for a retreat. "He came back and said, 'You know that side lawn? We're going to tear it out and plant a garden.'"

Since it opened in 2008, the garden has also served as a public space and a place to teach the community organic techniques. It has been staffed almost entirely by volunteers. Among them, often wearing overalls and a straw hat, was Father Peter himself.

The garden was just a start. Father Peter turned Holy Nativity into what he sometimes quipped was a community center with a church attached. He had a large oven built for communal bread-baking. He encouraged scout troops, musicians, artists, cooking classes and



Peter Rood, around 2013, in the garden at Holy Nativity Church, Westchester

practitioners of yoga and meditation to use the church. And he urged all those people to bring cans of food to donate to those in need, most of which also went to the pantry.

"It's not just that spot of dirt," said Joanne. "It's what that stimulates in the community around it. That's a bigger yield."

Father Peter moved to Washington State in 2019, but the garden still thrives. In 2021, for instance, it donated 1,623 pounds of produce to Food Pantry LAX. It grew more than 60 items, including 14 types of greens such as kale and chard, 10 types of herbs like sage and mint, 15 types of fruit including tangerines and apples, and other vegetables like squash and beans.

"We want to give them nice fresh produce, things they wouldn't ordinarily get," said Azita Banu, who now manages the garden.

While the garden accounts for only a small part of the food dispensed by Food Pantry LAX, it is definitely the freshest. The crops are



Azita Banu, manager of the garden

harvested late every Thursday afternoon and given out to pantry customers the following morning.

By creating the garden and bringing the community together, Father Peter truly followed Jesus's call to "Feed my sheep." A celebration of his life is being planned at Holy Nativity Church for December 30. ■

Volunteer of the Year: Scott Tanner

When Scott Tanner first joined the board of Food Pantry LAX in the early 2000's, the organization was in dire straits. It had little money and no facility of its own, instead bagging food for clients at a local church.

"We had some serious discussions about maybe the pantry should close up," recalled Scott.

But the pantry was saved in 2006 when a woman named Wilma S. Matz left the organization a large bequest in her will. Scott became the pantry's president in 2008 and guided it through years of growth and innovation. He stepped down as president in 2021 but remains on the board of directors.

For his long-term dedication to the pantry and the people we serve, Scott is being recognized as the pantry's Wilma S. Matz Volunteer of the Year, an award fittingly named after the woman who saved the pantry. The pantry's board rarely names one of its own members as the winner, but an exception was made because of Scott's years of extraordinary service.

Scott was born and raised in Southern California and now lives in Playa Del Rey with his wife, Sydney. They have five children and 11 grandchildren. He received a bachelor's degree in English and a master's degree in business from Brigham Young University and spent his career as a mortgage banker, from which he retired in 2011.

It was his lifetime involvement with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints that led Scott to

the pantry. He was bishop, a lay position, in the Westchester branch and was active in the local diocese. In that capacity, in the 1990s he joined the Westchester-Ladera Clergy Association, the organization that had started the pantry in 1985. A few years later, he was on the pantry's board.

During Scott's tenure as president, the pantry expanded its sources of funding and of food, striking deals with local bakeries and supermarkets. But challenges still loomed.

Among the largest was the Covid pandemic. Like many institutions, the pantry shut down in March, 2020, when lockdowns went into effect.

But Scott quickly realized that the pantry filled a vital need and had to reopen. Virtually single-handedly, he revamped the pan-

try's procedures so that it would be safe for both customers and for our volunteers, most of whom were over 65 and therefore at highest risk for serious Covid complications. The pantry reopened—to huge lines of customers—only two weeks after it had closed.

Besides remaining an active board member, Scott, 74, still picks up food once a week at a supermarket, though, he notes, "I can't lift as much as I used to." He is also director of communications for the Los Angeles region of his church. That involves him in distributing food from the church's own network of farms and packaging facilities to charities throughout the region.

For many people in the community, Scott remains the face of the Food Pantry LAX. That stems from the relationships he forged with

(Cont. on back page)



*Scott Tanner,
unloading
donations he
picked up at
Vons in Mar
Vista*

Scott Tanner *(Cont. from p. 3)*

women's clubs, rotary clubs, churches, schools and companies. Those relationships, perhaps Scott's most important contribution to the pantry, help in recruiting both donations and volunteers.

"We have a lot of good people in the community who want to do good things and are not sure where to do it," said Scott, saying he saw it as his role to direct some of that good will to Food Pantry LAX.

"I would hope it will continue to be seen as Westchester's food pantry, because if it is, it will always thrive," he said. "We lift the community by what we do." ■

*Food Pantry LAX gratefully acknowledges the generous bequest from the **Henry T. Weidemueller Jr. Trust**. An Air Force veteran and former Delta Air Lines pilot, **Ted Weidemueller** was a long-time Westchester resident and a devoted member of Holy Nativity Episcopal Church. He passed away in 2018 at age 78, but his generosity will help feed people in need for years to come.*

Hunger Surges *(Cont. from p. 1)*

Moreover, while inflation has ebbed somewhat recently, food prices remain much higher than they were a year or two ago. Even events on the other side of the world are having an effect—several refugee families from Ukraine and Russia are now receiving food from the pantry to help tide them over while they establish new lives in the United States.

High housing costs are a constant struggle for many people, and the money they save on food by coming to the pantry can help pay the rent.

Vance Webster said that the construction of So-Fi Stadium near his home has contributed to his rent increasing from \$1,300 to \$1,900 a month in recent years, and it looks like it will go higher.

"Eventually, I'll have to move," he said. "There's no way I'll be able to afford the rent."

Mr. Webster, 60, walks over to the pantry when he can get a break from his job doing maintenance at a nearby convalescent home. He is



Vance Webster

also moonlighting, doing janitorial and maintenance work at an apartment complex. On top of that, he is helping to raise three granddaughters.

"Any little help I can get helping me and to help them is a blessing," he said. ■

OUR MISSION: Food Pantry LAX is a supplementary food resource for low-income clients in Inglewood, Westchester, El Segundo, Hawthorne and portions of Los Angeles. Our policy is to provide food for 2 days or six meals to our clients.

Food Pantry LAX is located at

355 E. Beach Avenue
Inglewood, CA 90302
310-677-5597

Food Distribution:

Tuesday and Friday
9:30am—12:00pm

Mailing Address:

8726 S. Sepulveda Blvd.
Suite D PMB 741
Westchester, CA 90045

Email Address and Website:

FoodPantryLAX@gmail.com
Foodpantrylax.org

Drivers Needed!



Food Pantry LAX is looking for volunteers who can help with food pickup and delivery to the Food Pantry. If you have a large vehicle and would be willing to help transport goods, please contact us at 310-677-5597.