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WINTER 2021 NEWSLETTER

WWW.FOODSHARE.COM

FOOD SHARE

ventura county



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A note from your CEO

As I write this letter to you, the roll out of a COVID-19 vaccine has brought a tantalizing glimmer of light at the end of the long tunnel of 2020. But, as much as we are excited at the prospect of a return to some normalcy in 2021, here at Food Share we have learned from past experiences that the economic ripple-effect of a disaster like the pandemic is as long as it is deep. It will take many months, if not years, for thousands of people in our community to recover any of the financial stability they once may have enjoyed.

The issue of pervasive hunger in our community is something I talk about in more depth on pages 4-5, where you can read excerpts from an interview I gave to Ventana Monthly. As I explain, disasters like this pandemic just bring more attention to a problem that exists every day. Even before the pandemic, the vast majority of the people seeking our assistance were working families — people who are employed but in low-income jobs and often living expense to expense. Many more are now in that same situation, and it will be some

considerable time before they can regain their footing.

On a positive note, we are buoyed by the young people in our community who are using their creative and entrepreneurial talents to bring greater awareness to our mission. You can read about the fundraising activities of just a few of them on page 7. What a joy it is to see their compassion and dedication to helping our hungry friends and neighbors!

What a joy too, to see the incredible CAN-trees that were built in homes and businesses across the county. Not only did they look spectacular, the cans are a critical source of food in the forthcoming months.

With the support of the community, we will continue to lead the fight against hunger in Ventura County. Whether it is through donating food, becoming a monthly financial donor, or joining our family of volunteers, on behalf of all of us at Food Share — THANK YOU!



Monica White
Monica White
President & CEO

Since the onset of COVID-19, your support has helped us:



Distribute **360,000**
Disaster Food Boxes



Hold **More Than 285**
Pop-up Distributions



Serve more than
1 Million Individuals



Rally **76,000**
Volunteer Hours



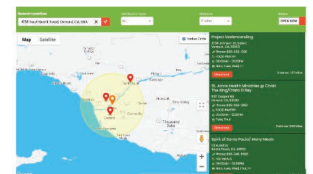
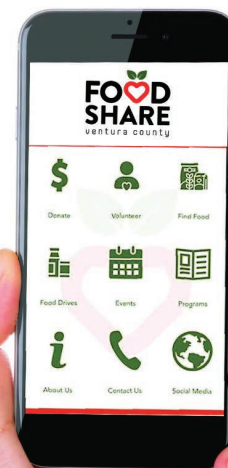
Distribute **21 Million**
Pounds of Food



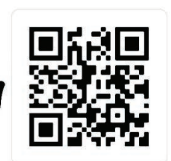
Distribute **35,000**
Senior Kits

Download OUR NEW SMARTPHONE APP!

NEW FEATURE! Find the nearest pantry, meal, or drive-thru distribution open NOW! with the Find Food Now map.

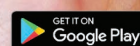


- Find food NOW!
- Sign up to volunteer
- Host a food drive
- Make a donation



Scan me

to download the app.



Search "Food Share of
Ventura County."



CAN-tree success! JUST A LITTLE DIFFERENTLY!

For obvious reasons, CAN-tree, Food Share's popular, annual, festive food & fund drive was a little different in 2020. This event is typically located at Figueroa Plaza in downtown Ventura, but this year 70 individuals, families, and local businesses built more than 100 trees at their home or business location. **These cans are a critical source of support for thousands, so a huge thank you to everyone who took part in providing an astounding 100,000 lbs of food!**



Monica White was interviewed in the November issue of Ventana Monthly. Excerpts of the interview are reprinted here, with the permission of editor Nancy D. Lackey Shaffer and Ventana Magazine. Cover photo courtesy of Luis Chavez at Ventana Monthly.

Food Share of Ventura County fulfills a vital purpose: Providing food to the many people in the area who need it. That amounts to hundreds of thousands of Ventura County residents since its inception in 1978. Leading the charge today is President and CEO Monica White, who took over leadership in 2017 after 13 years as director of marketing and circulation at the Ventura County Star. Since then, Food Share has seen food insecurity grow, following numerous wildfires and now the COVID-19 pandemic ... and the organization, its staff and numerous volunteers have not hesitated to rise to the challenge. We spoke with White about food insecurity in the county today, how Food Share is meeting that need and what more remains to be done.

How pervasive is food insecurity in Ventura County?

Even in normal circumstances, an estimated 1 in 6 people in Ventura County experiences food insecurity, meaning they don't always have access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food. That number includes more than 40,000 children.

What are some of the biggest challenges with meeting the needs of those who require Food Share's assistance?

Since the onset of COVID-19, the biggest challenges have been purchasing, storing and packing enough food to meet the increased demand. We've increased the amount of food we purchase each month from \$50,000 to \$400,000. That's been a challenge financially, and also in terms of storage space.

We have 36,000 sq ft of warehousing space at our Oxnard facility, but with the additional inventory we were bursting at the seams. We were very fortunate that local businessman, Lawrence Joss, provided us with an additional warehouse for free, temporarily.

We're using that new space to not only store food but also pack the 250,000 emergency food boxes we've distributed since the beginning of April, with the help of the 146th Airlift Wing of the CA Air National Guard.

The COVID-19 pandemic has, of course, changed a lot of things for a lot of people, including in Ventura County. Did Food Share see its client base grow? How were you able to meet the additional need?

Before the pandemic, many of the families Food Share served would need supplemental food perhaps two-three times a year. Most were low-income working families.

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, we've seen an unprecedented rise in need in addition to the 75,000 people we typically serve on a monthly basis. Our latest estimates suggest the number is closer to 150,000 as low-income families in our community have borne the full brunt of the layoffs and reduced hours in all sectors.

In addition to those in the service and hospitality sectors, we've also seen an increased need among farm workers, many of whom have had their hours cut as the demand for fresh produce from schools, restaurants and entertainment venues was depleted.

How did Food Share's work change as a result of pandemic-related shutdowns and restrictions?

“Food Share exists to help people who are going through difficult times — hunger, after all, is a disaster for every individual who has to experience it, regardless of the cause. Disasters like this pandemic just bring more attention to a problem that exists every day.”

- Monica White

What we're now experiencing is food insecurity on a much bigger scale. At the beginning of the pandemic, nearly 25% of our network of pantry partners suspended distribution, which left a real gap in the community at a time when people needed food the most.

We've responded by holding more than 200 drive-thru

emergency food distributions in locations all over the county — providing food direct to the community. We've also significantly increased the amount of food we purchase, to ensure that our pantry partners that have remained open have enough food to meet the need.



Looking at the big picture of food insecurity, what do you think are the primary problems creating that? Is it the cost of food, the ability to access it, something else?

Food insecurity may seem like a complex issue, but at its root, it's closely tied to income inequality.

“There’s a perception that we just serve the homeless, but the reality is that the vast majority of the people seeking assistance are the working poor — people who are employed but in low-income jobs and often living expense to expense.”

- Monica White

To give some context, the median salary for a full-time minimum wage employee in Ventura County is approximately \$31,200 a year. After taxes, take home pay is less than \$2,000 a month. Even if two or more people in a household are working, if it's in a low-wage job that's still desperately little to live on in Southern California. But sometimes it's still too much to qualify for food assistance programs like SNAP or WIC.

Many people are dealing with the issue of underemployment — like a woman I met last week, working at a local coffee chain, who can only work a few hours a week because the kids are not in school. She told me what a life saver it is to be able to pick up a box of food at one of our local pantries.

I don't think we'll see a significant drop in demand for food for many months to come. Until the pandemic is well and truly over and the economy starts to recover, we expect to continue feeding those in need for months or even years to come.

What kinds of things would keep people from needing the assistance of Food Share and other food banks?

That's a huge question, with no single, straightforward answer. While I would like to think with hard work, collaboration and community support, it's possible to end hunger. In reality, I don't see that happening in my lifetime. Are there opportunities to further support those in need with other services that will ultimately help them put food on the table? Absolutely. But for now, our role as the food people is to serve those in need and while others are welcome to figure out how to shorten the line, we'll be feeding the line.

What are the biggest challenges of your job?

What are the biggest rewards?

In many ways, the challenges are the rewards. We distributed 17 million pounds of food last year. It takes a lot of people and infrastructure to do that efficiently, which certainly brings its fair share of challenges. But I'm rewarded by working with a truly awesome team of staff, volunteers and organizational supporters. The biggest reward of all comes from seeing the appreciation of the people we serve. That's really special.

What plans do you have for the future of Food Share?

We've been in our current location for 35 years. It's served us very well, but we're now at a pivotal point where if we're to continue to serve the number of people in need with the quality of food they deserve, then we need to take a hard look at expanding our facilities. Despite COVID-19, we're excited to be moving forward with the studies and analysis to determine what we need to meet the need for the next 40 years.



FOOD SHARE TEAM SERVES *Ventura County seniors*



According to the National Council on Aging, 43% of older adults and 21% of married seniors rely on social security for over 90% of their income. High regional living costs, healthcare, and housing mean that for many older adults in Ventura County, what should be “golden years” are often the years of economic hardship and the gnawing stress of food insecurity.

Food Share reaches many of these seniors through the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) a USDA-funded program aimed at improving the health of low-income people aged 60+ by supplementing their diets with nutritious food.

CSFP Manager, Iris Salazar, and her team distribute food boxes to more than 3,500 food-insecure Ventura County seniors a month at 34 locations across the county. The program has been even more

vital during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has seen as many as 25% of Food Share’s community pantry partners close, at least temporarily.

“It’s a lifeline for many of the seniors. We have capacity to help more people so if you or someone you know is 60+ and has an income at or below 130 percent of the Federal Poverty Income Guidelines then please encourage them to sign up.” - Iris

For more information on the CSFP program including the current distribution locations please visit our website at foodshare.com/senior.



STAFF *spotlight* Iris Salazar

Iris has worked at Food Share for 4 years, managing the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) serving 3,500 food-insecure seniors a month.

Why I work here: I work at Food Share because it shares my vision and values. I have always been passionate about helping the community. I started doing the CSFP outreach and loved the interaction and learning about our community’s needs

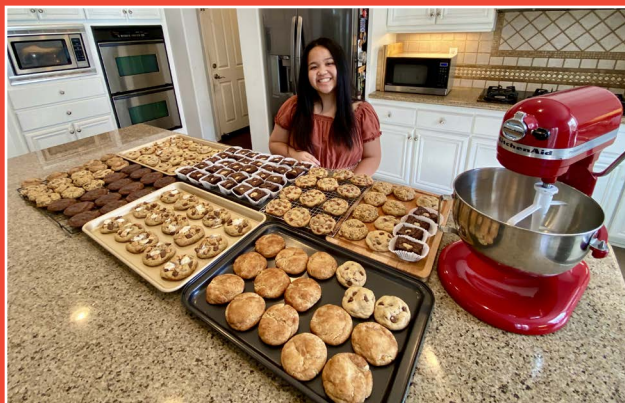
Best part of your job: The best part of my job is knowing I’m making a

difference in the lives of vulnerable seniors who are struggling with food insecurity.

One thing you didn’t know about me: Growing up, my family received assistance from Food Share. We were very grateful for the help we received during those hard times and I’m honored to be able to give back now.

Talented teens give back!

We are so proud and inspired by the numerous young people who have given their time and talents to help those in need in the past year. Here are just a few of the many who have used their passion, vision, and creativity to serve our community. You rock!



Maddie has been donating funds generated by her baking talents to support Food Share. What a delicious way to spread love and hope to our community in need!

“I have been baking since sixth grade, but my passion grew during quarantine. I started this business because I wanted to share my baked goods with more people besides just friends and family. I’ve sold more than 5,000 cookies in less than three months. I love to bake because it’s very relaxing and an opportunity for me to be creative. But most of all, I love to bake because you can’t beat the smile on someone’s face when you hand them baked goods! Food Share is a great way to support my local community. I enjoy working with the people at Food Share. They’re all so kind and giving!” - Maddie



Lucas, Tommy, Vinny, Darwin, and Summer, aka NO IDEA — SoCal’s coolest new band — did a charity gig in their Camarillo neighborhood, raising over \$3,000 for Food Share. Musical rock stars AND fundraising superstars! Pictured (l-r) Three members of the band, Summer, Darwin, and Lucas dropped by Food Share to deliver the proceeds of their gig.



The Rusty Sailors Robotics team at Cabrillo Middle School used their awesome engineering skills to build a CAN-tree robot AND raise \$2,430 in funds!



(Photo for illustration purposes only.)

NICOLE’S STORY

Nicole is a student at Moorpark College taking her prerequisites before transferring to a 4-year college. She has been visiting Ruben Castro Charities (RCC), one of Food Share’s network of pantry partners, both to collect food for her family and to work as a volunteer.

“When I returned to school, I quit my job, but that left my family of five very short of money. I was able to contribute to my family’s needs with the food from the pantry. This is how I met Alejandro Castro (RCC’s manager) and the group of volunteers who help provide support. Having RCC in our community gives a sense of security and lessens the daily stresses for many families. I started volunteering after classes on Tuesday. It’s important to give back, even if it’s only my time. This experience has inspired me to not only be a better person and help others but one day I hope to open up a non-profit myself.”



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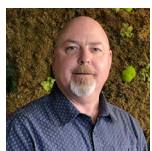
*Head of North America
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Monica White

INTRODUCING THREE NEW BOARD MEMBERS!

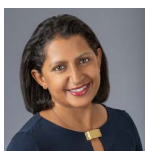
Food Share's Board of Directors provides strategic and financial direction to our leadership team and actively participates in fundraising and networking activities. We're delighted to welcome three new members to our dedicated board.



Drew West is the recently retired General Manager of Global Academic

Partnerships for The Trade Desk, based in Ventura, collaborating with traditional and non-traditional education institutions to prepare students for successful careers within the AdTech industry. Drew lives in Ojai, and is an avid supporter of community service initiatives related to education, shelter and housing, food and nutrition, and at-risk senior and child assistance programs.

"I support Food Share because I believe that meeting basic needs, such as access to good food and nutrition, is critical to the health of our community ... and that giving and helping others in need is critical to the health of our society."



Hannah Wirz has over 22 years of experience in the Agricultural industry and currently

manages Product Supply for Bayer's North America Vegetable business. She derives great satisfaction from being part of the food supply chain responsible for feeding our growing population. She enjoys using her business acumen and leadership skills to build strong teams and organizations. Hannah also serves as Vice Chair on the Board of Directors for the Pacific Coast of the American Red Cross.

"As someone working daily in the agriculture industry, I am excited to help make a vital organization like Food Share able to succeed and grow. Access to food has never been more important and I look forward to working closely with the board to further Food Share's mission."



Mark Miller has an eclectic career background with marketing, sales

and product management roles in entertainment, food safety, and healthcare. More recently, he has used his skills to bring custom lighting solutions to the food and construction industries. He lives in Camarillo and, in his spare time, enjoys cooking, discovering new restaurants, live music, museums, hiking, gardening and volunteering.

"I'm excited to be joining the Board of Directors. Ventura County faces many compelling challenges, but food insecurity shouldn't be one of them."