



Q&A WITH PANTRY DIRECTOR DIANE MEEHAN

How long have you worked at the Hilltown Pantry?

Diane: I have worked as director of the Hilltown Pantry for 25 years. For the first twelve years it was a program of Hampshire Community Action Commission, and in 2005, at the urging of Chesterfield resident David Kielson, the Northampton Survival Center brought the Hilltown Pantry on as their first and only satellite program.

What role does the pantry play in the hilltowns?

Diane: Many clients use the pantry as a regular, monthly source of supplemental food to help them secure a better financial future. The hilltowns are spread out over a large geographic area, but there is a great sense of community—I see that as our clients assemble in our hallway waiting, sometimes an hour or more for the pantry to open, enjoying just sitting and talking with folks they might not see otherwise.

Is there a client story that stands out for you?

Diane: In September a young mother of three needed our help in her last year of nursing school as the demands of school and motherhood left no time for her to work, even part time. She is so looking forward to starting her nursing career and not needing pantry services any longer.

Why do you do this work?

Diane: I think of the old bumper sticker that reads, “think globally, act locally.” We all hear of horrible hunger and starvation all over the world. But we also know that food insecurity and hunger exist right here in Hampshire County. Last spring a nine-year-old boy put his arm around his mother’s waist as they were leaving the pantry and said with a smile “It looks like it’s all you can eat at our house tonight!” and his mom turned around and gave us a thumbs up. That’s the kind of thing that keeps me going.

Tell me about your volunteers.

Diane: The volunteers who come week after week, year after year, and treat our clients with friendliness and concern are at our core. Our space is crowded, but they have developed their very own dance to make it all work.



Diane with volunteer Laura Barrus, “chief recycler and composter.”

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The Hilltown Pantry is located in the Town Office Building at 40 Main Street (Route 9) in Goshen.

SECRET SHOPPERS One couple anonymously steps up

He’s a deacon at their church, and believes in doing what he can. Participating in the church’s food drive with a box or two of food just didn’t feel like enough. About three years ago they decided to “cut out the middleman” and bring the food directly to the pantry.

“We shop for the pantry at the same time we shop for ourselves, and we think about what we like. It’s mostly healthy stuff, but maybe I’ll throw some vanilla wafers in there to mix it up. We’re seniors so we think about seniors

and what they can use—they don’t need a huge jar of peanut butter that will last forever, and they can’t get the lid off if they do get that size. And we think about the kids—we get them juice boxes or pudding for their school lunches, and oatmeal as it gets colder.”

They don’t want to flaunt themselves or reveal who they are, just as they recognize the desire for some clients to be private in getting food. “We don’t know who needs what, but we all know it could happen to any of us, so we try to get stuff that will help.”



“My overall impression of the Hilltown Pantry is how incredibly necessary it is, run completely without bias or judgment. And having a regular source of supplemental food in this remote and rural area can be paramount to a healthy household’s survival.”

—Charlie Hayes, Social Services Program Manager, Hilltown Community Development

A SMILE & A SONG

Bruce & Phoebe Harrison,
father and daughter volunteers

Bruce says it’s “like a family,” volunteering at the Hilltown Pantry, and he and Phoebe worry about clients when they don’t show up. Bruce retired 13 years ago, and Phoebe, who is homeschooled, joins her father to help out at the pantry, unloading and loading vehicles and stocking shelves. Her energy is unbounded and when not at the pantry, she teaches sign language, volunteers at the nearby pre-school, and sings a capella (sometimes even at the pantry). Bruce sees the pantry as making a “huge difference” in the lives of the hilltown families, so clients don’t have to decide between buying food or paying the electric bill. He helps pick up donations from the Old Creamery Co-op and also delivers food to clients who have a hard time getting out. Compost from the pantry goes to Bruce’s pigs, and his honey is sold at Oliver’s Farm Stand across the driveway.



MEET STEVE PHILBRICK, MINISTER



“It was bigger than both of us. God found us.” Steve Philbrick is explaining how he came to be a licensed UCC Minister 24 years ago, when the West Cummington Church was without one. Rotating into the role of volunteer minister when a fellow parishioner named him as the natural permanent choice, he opened his mouth to say “no” and found “yes” coming out instead.

In the decades since, through the joys and challenges of a “24/7” role, Steve has overseen a ten-fold growth in the size of the congregation. He explained why the church, as one of several houses of worship making meaningful contributions to the Hilltown Pantry, is so involved: “We are believers in the food pantry, and we recognize that Cummington is the largest recipient of its services. The pantry isn’t a **them**, it’s an **us**.”

Four times a year, the church hosts a popular “Stories for Dessert” series, featuring homemade soup, bread donated by Bread Euphoria, and potluck desserts. “Let me tell you, this is not an orange-jello-and-mandarin-

oranges kind of community—these folks can cook!” he marvels. After a hearty dinner, guests of all ages gather around for story-telling, and collect funds for the Hilltown Pantry.

“People in the hilltowns are squeamish about being in need. We love community, but we’re independent and like being a bit isolated. So it’s hard to ask for help, and many fear that if they take what they need, there won’t be enough for the next person.” With access to a small discretionary fund, Steve sometimes offers help to a parishioner with a broken car or a spouse having surgery, only to hear “Thanks—I’ll let you know if I need it.” Looking around at their home he finds himself thinking, “you *do* need it.” But pride and independence get in the way. He credits Diane’s demeanor with making the pantry as open as it is. “I can’t think of anyone more low-key and welcoming than Diane, and she’s great at connecting people to other services they might need.”

“The pantry isn’t a **them**, it’s an **us**.”

FOOD RECEIVED IN 2018

Food Bank, donated: 27,324 pounds
 Food Bank, fee-based: 19,487 pounds
 Retail purchases: 10,937 pounds
 Community donations: 8,372 pounds

SOWING AND REAPING A bountiful community of caring



Four years ago, next door neighbor Ruby Hutt and her husband opened what is now known as **Oliver's Farm Stand**, named after their two-year-old son, and began making regular food donations to the pantry. Besides tending to 40 chickens and various flower beds, they sell produce from other nearby farms. Their business has doubled in size from last year, with half their produce being organic in response to increasing demand.

“We try to give to as many pantries and fundraisers as possible. Our completely natural sourdough bread is a labor of love and we want it to nurture people.”

—Geri Pollard, owner, *Bread Euphoria*



Gary Hurd of Westhampton has been faithfully delivering some 10 to 15 dozen fresh eggs from his flock to the pantry for many years. His variety of chickens produce eggs in an assortment of colors, setting his dozens apart from the more conventional but less favored commercial eggs.



New Hingham Regional Elementary School in

Chesterfield organizes a school-wide food drive every November for the pantry. Says PTO Chair April Judd, “We want the kids to understand that not everyone has enough food and that by every child giving a little it adds up to a lot.” Last



year they collected food at their Thanksgiving Share, with students, parents, and community members gathering for a snack, songs, and sharing gritudes.



Crabapple Farm in Chesterfield: three generations farming on 180 acres of woodlands and pasture

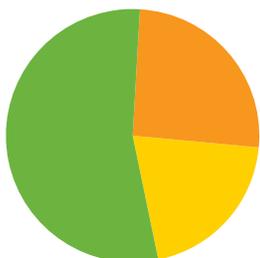
Finding they still had good food left over at the end of sales at Tuesday Market, farmers Rachel and Tevis found the Hilltown Pantry and have been donating regularly ever since—usually cucumbers, summer squash, eggplant, lettuce, and other greens. By donating their products to the pantry, they work from a value of contributing to “a healthy society based on healthy people eating healthy food grown in healthy soil.”

Cummington painter and children’s book illustrator **Buz Pixley**, whose wife is on disability, is part of a large three-generation family that is grateful

to use the pantry. He describes it fondly as “a godsend —where you see old friends and meet new ones.”



CLIENTS BY AGE GROUP



■ Adults 18–64
 ■ Children 0–17
 ■ Adults 65+



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United Way of Hampshire County

A FRIEND IN THE ASSESSOR'S OFFICE

Goshen's town assessor connects seniors with the assistance they deserve

In referring people to the pantry, Gina Papineau has witnessed “a kind of old-fashioned pride” that makes it difficult for many people, especially seniors, to ask for the help they need. She sees this first-hand with the Senior Exemption available in the Goshen Assessor's Office. Low-income residents age 70 and over are entitled to a \$500 reduction in annual real estate taxes, yet only five or six people in Goshen make use of it. “People are private and hesitant to ask for help,” she acknowledges. But when taxes increase, instead of skipping meals, Gina wishes people would go to the food pantry, and also see her next door to sign up for the tax break.

Many who give in the hilltowns prefer action to recognition,

making it challenging to fully convey the vibrancy of the community that surrounds and supports the Hilltown Pantry. We found that generous donors and grateful clients alike routinely dismissed questions about their involvement with gestures of “why make a fuss?” In the end, the offbeat half-door exit from the pantry to the driveway seemed a fitting symbol for the faceless hands of benevolence reaching in to and out from the pantry. We feel honored to be a resource to help folks in the region maintain their self-reliance, and hope the stories of this newsletter will help unmask some of the richness of the hilltown community.



Hilltown Spectacular

A musical extravaganza by and for the community

New Hingham Regional Elementary School, Chesterfield

Sunday, January 13, 2019

12:30 pm: International Potluck Buffet

2 pm: Concert with talented local musicians and featured guest performances from afar

Fourth annual benefit for the pantry hosted by Chesterfield Council on Aging and organized by sculptor and musician James Kitchen.

CLIENT VISITS BY COMMUNITY

- Williamsburg: 608
- Chesterfield: 414
- Goshen: 298
- Worthington: 271
- Cummington: 207
- Plainfield: 143
- Huntington: 61
- Westhampton: 53
- Northampton: 12
- Other communities: 3

