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## A BRIGHT STAR SHINES THE WAY IN ASSUMPTION PARISH

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The Bright Morning Star Church's food pantry lives up to its name by acting as a guiding light for many food-insecure residents in Assumption Parish. Inside the pantry, however, holds its own star: the pantry's director, Gwendolyn Hadrick. Since the pantry's creation in 2019, Gwendolyn's effervescent energy has been spread to her neighbors in need every second Saturday of the month.

"I'll never forget the first time the truck came. That's a feeling that you never forget, of excitement and knowing that we're going to get this food to feed somebody that's really in need," she said. "This is a rural area, so many people are in need: children, adults, and seniors."

Recent statistics prove this claim, showing that 1 in 4 children and 1 in 6 individuals are food insecure in Assumption Parish. However, it's not hard to see the need within the community surrounding the Bright Morning Star Baptist Church. Some of the homes in the area are boarded up and some are falling apart. On top of that, vegetation and access to resources are scarce.

Gwendolyn meets her neighbors in need monthly, saying "so many of them come with a smile on their face, but they're heartbroken and hungry. If we're able to feed somebody a good meal, that's a blessing. I thank God that we're able to help out our community in Assumption Parish."

The Bright Morning Star Church's food pantry never shut down during the coronavirus pandemic, and they don't plan on closing their doors because of inflation, either. Gwendolyn shared that when the pantry first started, they were serving around 85 households. Now, they serve up to 110 households. Not only are first-time families getting in line, but people who sought help five to six months ago are still attending.

"The new families that are coming, they are saying that gas is so high, and food is so expensive in the store. They heard about the food bank, and they wanted to come and sign up for it," Gwendolyn said. "It has increased a lot, you know, mainly since the cost of living has gone up."

While plenty of people give their thanks, Gwendolyn also hears a lot of people saying how rough things are right now. To which she replies, "you're not alone." These wise words could not be truer in our current economic climate. It seems as if everyone, including The Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank, has been having to face these financial hardships in one way or another.

Gwendolyn noted the importance of donations to the Food Bank during this time, stating that donors' gifts get put to the utmost use.

"The Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank is the best. It's the amount of food and the type of food, you know," she said. "Everything is up to par. They provide enough food to where we can make sure everybody that's outside has groceries."

These groceries are placed directly into recipients' cars by Gwendolyn's beloved volunteers. She shares that her volunteers are happy to serve and even happier to see the smiles on the people's faces.

"It's a great honor to do it. It is so amazing how we are helping out a lot of people in our parish," she said. "I have had so many phone calls and texts from the people that come, that are so thankful and honored that we're doing this for them. So, it makes you feel good."

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## HOW TO MAKE GROCERIES WORK ON A BUDGET

It is no secret that inflation has affected many households within the United States this year. More than ever, people are trying their best to make ends meet. As grocery bills rise, it is essential for families to know how to stretch the value of their dollars.

“Knowing what you have on hand is a big deal. Sometimes you buy stuff, and it gets lost,” says Jordyn Barlow, senior manager of nutrition services at the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank.

Jordyn suggests that taking inventory of what you may already have in your pantry is the essential first step to saving money. Not only does this allow you to make more appropriate grocery lists, but it can also help you make weekly meal plans with what you already have. Taking inventory also lets you know what is expiring soon, making meal prioritization easier.

Beans are both an easy food category to start with for stretching your food budget. They are also a great source of protein. Beans alone can be mixed with filling grains like rice or quinoa for a delicious meal. Even adding refried beans into ground meat can double your protein intake for a nearly similar taste.

If you happen to be out of beans, consider restocking with a bagged, dry version. Since these beans require cooking in water, you can easily watch portion sizes and effectively save the rest for other meals. Bagged beans are also low in sodium when compared to their canned counterparts.

You, or a family member, might be against substituting a meat preference with beans. However, there is still a way to purchase meat in a cost-effective manner. Buying your meat in bulk is the

smartest decision for the current moment, as it can last up to six months in the freezer.

“When you’re buying bigger portions, it might seem more costly at the time. But over time, it’s going to be way more cost-effective than buying smaller packs,” says Jordyn.

If a bulk purchase may be out of budget, you can still get protein from meats packaged in water like tuna or chicken. These proteins can be mixed with simple condiments like mayonnaise, mustard, and relish to make a simple tuna or chicken salad. For a side dish, consider giving canned or frozen vegetables a try.

Frozen produce that is prepackaged works just as well as its fresh counterparts. You can even freeze fresh fruits and vegetables that you may be able to find on clearance yourself. Local grocery stores will offer produce sales throughout the year, but we also suggest buying from farm stands.

“Your local produce stands have what’s in season, and usually they’re way more cost-effective,” says Jordyn.

When it comes to purchasing shelf-stable snacks, try avoiding the individually packaged variety packs. Buying the original items in bulk helps you to portion them out to you or your child’s appetite size. For healthy snack options, try applesauce, fruits in 100% juice or water, and rice cakes.

Many of these items are foods we encourage people to donate directly to the Food Bank. If you are looking for help in acquiring some of these items from a member agency, please visit <https://brfoodbank.org/get-help/> or download our free mobile app for more information.

# VINCE FERACHI COMMUNITY GARDEN EYES FALL HARVEST VOLUNTEERS



If you're traveling west on I-12, you may have never noticed a diamond in the rough just a few feet below. On a small street shooting off of O'Neal Lane lies the Vince Ferachi Community Garden. This Community Garden has been serving The Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank since 2019 and has provided thousands of meals for our neighbors in need.

Adjacent to the Capitol City Produce headquarters, the garden acts as a beacon of light for the Food Bank. Nutrition is a top priority at the Food Bank, and the Community Garden ensures that fresh produce can be brought to the tables of people facing hunger. As Fall approaches, the garden is being prepared for a great seasonal harvest.

With a more efficient way of planting and harvesting, Cameron Ferachi is excitedly looking forward to the new season. Cameron, a fourth-generation family employee at Capitol City Produce, works as the property's gardener and on-site volunteer coordinator. Working alongside his Ferachi family members at Capitol City Produce, Cameron is no stranger to familial traditions. This is

why he's taking southern tradition to the soil this year.

"This season we're thinking about the New Year's holiday, so we're doing nothing but cabbage. We have about 3,000 cabbage plants going," says Cameron.

According to southern folklore, eating this vegetable on New Year's Day is said to bring prosperity, money, luck and good health. Cameron is hoping to bring this good fortune to the tables of his neighbors in need. And so far, he's been successful.

Just last season, the Community Garden harvested 5,000 pounds of squash, zucchini and eggplant. Nearly 4,900 meals were able to be provided through the Food Bank because of this harvest. This is a massive jump from only two short years ago when harvests averaged 500 pounds. This growth was made possible by Cameron's new gardening techniques.

Innovations extend past the Community Garden, too. Thanks to the addition of an industrial-sized cooler in the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank warehouse, the garden's produce is able to be effectively stored for maximum quality throughout its lifespan.

This expansion has also allowed for more products like vegetables, proteins and dairy to be stored longer. In this way, the Food Bank is able to help more people.

Recipients of these nutritious products aren't the only ones who benefit, however. The Food Bank supports the Community Garden by recruiting volunteers to work in the garden. Volunteers are welcomed and encouraged to help out at the Community Garden as the harvest season approaches. This is a great opportunity to give back to the community and learn about gardening from an expert. Volunteers can expect to weed, harvest and wash. No previous farming experience or knowledge is required.

As August comes to a wrap, the garden will need volunteers' help. If you would like to join Cameron at the Community Garden or learn more about the opportunity, visit <https://brfoodbank.org/give-time-home/> or download our mobile app for the soonest opportunities.



# SERVING WITH A PURPOSE



Tucked away in the city of Baton Rouge stands the Datta Temple. Established in 1997 under the guidance of Sri Ganapathi Sachchidanda Swamiji, it is fully staffed by a full-time priest who is trained in the ancient ways of Hinduism as it is practiced in India. The temple was the first of its kind in the United States.

Recently, Sri Swamiji arrived in Baton Rouge from India to celebrate his 80th birthday and the 25th anniversary of the temple. Michael G. Manning, President and CEO of the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank, had the unique opportunity to tell the Food Bank story at the invitation of the Datta Temple and Sri Swamiji.

Sri Swamiji was born at Mekedatu in southern India. He has served and helped the people in his community since his childhood where his spiritual guidance has long been respected. One of the core teachings of Sri Swamiji is 'Annadanam' which is the practice of donating food to those in need. In Sanskrit, 'Annam' means food and 'Daanam' means donate. 'Annadanam' means 'feeding the hungry.' In Hinduism, the simple act of giving someone food is the equivalent of giving someone life.

Mike talked about the Food Bank, the need for food for those in need in our 11-parish service area, and the Food Bank's mission of feeding the hungry. Sri Swamiji and Datta Temple leaders presented Mike with the gift of a shawl and a donation check. Congregants of the temple also made additional donations during the event.

"We were honored for the invitation to speak about the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank's mission to feed people in need regardless of race, religion, or situation," said Mike. "Helping others in our community is a shared interest for leading a purposeful life. The tremendous donation from the Datta Temple will help us feed many hungry families in our community who deal with food insecurity on a daily basis."

Following the visit, temple leaders toured the Food Bank warehouse. During the tour, they learned other ways to support the Food Bank, how to give food donations, how to host food drives and how to volunteer. Helping others in the community not only furthers the mission of the Food Bank but aligns with the Sri Swamiji's messaging of living a purposeful life.

"This is just the start of something temple leaders and volunteers want to continue with the Food Bank and in the community," says Manish Sthanki.

To learn more on how to host a food drive, become an agency, or to volunteer, download our free mobile app or visit our website at [brfoodbank.org](http://brfoodbank.org).

"Helping others in our community is a shared interest for leading a purposeful life".

MIKE

## LOUISIANA #1 IN CHILD HUNGER 107k+ FOOD INSECURE IN OUR AREA

Map the Meal Gap 2022 is the latest Feeding America report on food insecurity at the state and parish level from 2020 data.

With the onset of the pandemic and shutdowns across the state in the spring of 2020, many families came to a food bank for the first time in their lives. Our member agencies saw an increase in food clients due to layoffs or disruptions to family incomes that lasted for the majority of the year.

Your Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank held a record number of food distributions to meet that demand and to cover our agencies who closed for the safety of their elderly volunteers.

**Below are hunger statistics for our 11-parish area.**

### 11-PARISH DATA



# 17.2

MILLION MEAL GAP  
IN OUR SERVICE AREA



# 1 IN 5

CHILDREN IN OUR AREA  
ARE FOOD INSECURE



# 1 IN 8

INDIVIDUALS IN OUR AREA  
ARE FOOD INSECURE



# 107,340

INDIVIDUALS IN OUR  
AREA ARE FOOD INSECURE



# 41,420

CHILDREN IN OUR AREA  
ARE FOOD INSECURE

LOUISIANA ALSO RANKS

# #3 IN

FOOD INSECURITY  
AMONG SENIORS



# IS #1

IN THE COUNTRY WITH  
THE HIGHEST CHILD  
FOOD INSECURITY  
RATE OF ALL STATES



*Just \$1 can help provide up to to 3 meals. Donate at [brfoodbank.org](https://brfoodbank.org).*



# CORPORATE VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: EXXONMOBIL



A few times throughout the year at the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank, our parking lot overflows with cars, the board room is packed with people, and there is an ocean of matching shirts throughout our warehouse. That's when you know the ExxonMobil volunteer team has shown up to volunteer - sorting and packing food boxes for children, seniors, and families in need.

They mean business because they know people need food. Our mission to feed the food insecure in our community becomes the ExxonMobil volunteer team's mission as well. Even throughout the pandemic and Hurricane Ida, ExxonMobil has always been willing to show up and make a difference when we needed it most.

"ExxonMobil is proud to support the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank to feed families in our community. Our employee volunteers appreciate the opportunity to give back to make the community where we live and work a better place. Volunteering at the Food Bank has provided a unique opportunity for our employees to work together to build relationships while sorting and packing boxes to serve others," says Shanna Noble, Turnaround and Construction Department Head at ExxonMobil.

In 2021, we recognized ExxonMobil with our Outstanding Business Group Award for donating over 300 service hours to the Food Bank. The Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank relies heavily

on individual and group volunteers who give their time to help us pack and distribute food to families in need. We could not do what we do without our corporate partners.

The outstanding men and women of the ExxonMobil volunteer team consistently work together in our warehouse to organize, process and box non-perishable food that is then distributed through more than 100 member agencies across our 11-parish service area.

Their team embodies the spirit of volunteering which is to strengthen the community in which they live by working as one. They take great pride in the number of boxes they can build and items they can sort, making this an incredible cross-department team-building opportunity that strengthens the bond between each other while working together toward a common goal.

If your company is looking to get involved in volunteering with us, now is a great time. Corporate volunteer groups may reserve our board room for staff training, and they can also participate as a team of volunteers in our sorting and packing area.

For more information on how to register your own corporate volunteer group, please visit our website at [brfoodbank.org](http://brfoodbank.org) or contact our volunteer coordinator at (225) 359-9940 or by email at [volunteers@brfoodbank.org](mailto:volunteers@brfoodbank.org).

**DON'T FORGET TO SHARE THE FUN!  
TAG US IN YOUR PHOTOS**

Use hashtags #BRfamily #BRfoodbank



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