

HOW A CHANCE ENCOUNTER WITH A FOOD PANTRY CHANGED LIFE'S PATH



In everyone's life, there are crossroads. Moments in time where we decide to choose the road less traveled, not knowing where that journey may take us. In that moment, the decision may seem rather insignificant, but over time we come to realize that it may have perhaps changed our lives forever.

Meet Christian Jacobs, a 23-year-old Agriculture Business major at Southern University, who may not be where he is today if not for a decision he made while picking up a box of food for his mother at a local food pantry.

"My mom would go to the Second Baptist Church Food Pantry in the summers to make ends meet because schools were out, and those meals for our family were no longer available during the summer," said Jacobs. "One day my mom couldn't go to the pantry, and so she asked if I could go in her place to pick up the food. I got there early and was amazed at the line. While I was sitting in my car, one of the older volunteers noticed that I was young and asked if I could help them prepare and distribute the boxes. I said 'yes'."

That simple "yes" set Jacobs on a new path, but he didn't know it at the time. When the distribution was over, the volunteers prepared a box for Jacobs to take home and gave him some extra proteins on top for helping at the pantry which he was able to share with some of his neighbors upon returning home.

"I remember sitting in my car just staring into the windshield after and thinking 'man, this feels so good. Why do I feel so good?'," Jacobs recalls. "It was then that I decided I wanted to continue to volunteer at the food pantry on a regular basis and help others."

That one decision would open a new world of opportunities.

Jacobs graduated from Woodlawn High School and decided to go to Baton Rouge Community College, which in his family was not something thought to be attainable. As a first-generation college student, he enjoyed the academic competition and socialization with peers but was still searching for what he may want to do long term. He remembers being close to calling it quits.

"I was struggling to figure out what I really wanted to do and whether college was something I would finish. I went to dinner with my mom, and we were talking about it. A lady at a nearby table, who I would later come to know as Dr. Stewart, heard our conversation and said I should investigate the USDA 1890 land grant scholarship, which awards an academic scholarship to a four-year land-grant college in exchange for a commitment to work for the USDA upon graduation. I didn't think I had a shot at all, but I took a leap of faith, applied, and won the scholarship."

Since being awarded the scholarship, Jacobs has not only pursued his degree but has also started a student organization at Southern called Ag Business Students United which aims to secure internships for agricultural business students. As part of the organization's charter, members must perform a certain number of volunteer hours. And as it turns out, members have chosen to join Jacobs at the Second Baptist Food Pantry for their volunteer hours which has expanded his efforts from an army of one to an army of many.

"I'm so proud of how far the organization has come, and now I'm thinking about how I secure its legacy after I graduate," said Jacobs. "Looking back, I'm thankful for that day I decided to say yes. I want to inspire other people to think about what they can do to help others. You never know how things will work out."

HOW VOLUNTEERING PROVIDED A PATH FOR HEALING AND INSPIRATION



"I remember a time when my husband and I shared a candy bar for supper one night because that was all we could afford."

MONICA

As a long-time supporter of the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank, Monica Gill was thrilled when her company presented her with the opportunity to volunteer at the Food Bank. Monica was familiar with the Food Bank from television ads, but her financial support began when she saw an interview with Trevor Sims, a young boy battling cancer who began a city-wide food drive in Baton Rouge in 2013. The company Monica works for often volunteers around Baton Rouge, and in March of 2024, they came to the Food Bank.

"It's one place I've always wanted to go to see what it was about and to try to participate. I was so glad to be able to come here in person, and I was thoroughly impressed with it," said Monica. "I didn't know what to expect when I got here. I had heard about it, I had seen interviews on TV, but it wasn't like I thought it was going to be."

"It was a whole eye-opening experience to see how everything is done in such an order. I was just impressed with the cleanliness of everything, and how everything has a routine and a process. And the people working with you are very friendly; they don't care how many times you ask a question."

The mission of the Food Bank is also personal to Monica, as she has experienced food insecurity in her own life. In the 80's, Monica and her family were living in between rental homes and with family members.

"I remember a time when my husband and I shared a candy bar for supper one night because that was all we could afford. My 2-year-old son had to eat dry cereal on top of that many times," recalled Monica. "We did not know of any food banks or places to go to for help back then."

Monica's heart for giving back to her community goes even deeper than herself. She volunteers and donates to honor her late son.

"Volunteering means a lot to me. Even more now since my son passed away, and I try to do things in his memory," says Monica. "I couldn't help him, so I want to help others who need assistance. I want to help people that are still here and can be helped, because once they are gone, you can't even try to help them anymore."

"I feel like I have my son beside me when I'm volunteering, because I'm keeping him in my heart while I'm doing it. I used to be a shy person, and he was not the shy person. He was very outgoing, and I feel him pushing me sometimes to do things for others. I have some of his zest for life in me now."

The Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank relies on supporters like Monica Gill that give their time and money to end hunger in the Greater Baton Rouge area.

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DIFFERENT WAYS TO VOLUNTEER



Food Sorting & Repack

Volunteers serve in the sort and repack room to separate food into basic categories such as beverages, condiments, canned goods, snacks, etc. Volunteers also may pack food boxes on an assembly line for distribution to agencies.



Senior Grocery Program

Volunteers load food boxes, produce, milk, and/or protein products directly into client vehicles as part of our Senior Grocery Program distributions that take place on the first Saturday of each month from 7:30am to 10am.



2nd Tuesday Volunteer Nights

Volunteers work shifts in the warehouse sorting food, packing boxes, or performing other duties. Nights are themed for families, college students, and young professionals.



Mobile Pantry Distributions

Volunteers help with a “drive-through” model distribution. Clients remain in their vehicles to receive food boxes. Volunteers assist with off-loading the truck and bringing food product to vehicles.



Large Group Shifts

We welcome large group volunteer shifts from businesses, schools, youth groups or church organizations and more. Volunteers get more work done in larger groups.



Administrative Support

Volunteers who want to perform office duties may participate in letter folding, answering phones, data entry, scanning, filing, and/or other administrative needs.



To schedule a volunteer shift, visit brfoodbank.org.

BULK PACKAGING ROOM ADDS SECOND MACHINE TO BOOST PRODUCTION



With an economy that has been driving food costs up over the last few years, your Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank has been finding new ways to be more innovative in how we package and distribute food so that we can remain efficient with the funds we have to serve those in need. Our bulk packaging operation, one of the only food bank owned machines in the country, is a great example of how we are working to lower our cost per pound for food distributions which in turn allows us to serve more people.

Our first bulk packaging machine, a generous donation from the Ron Zappe Family and Lamar Family Foundation prior to the flood of 2016, has been overhauled a few times since then to find efficiencies in production. At the end of last year, we were able to acquire a second bulk machine, effectively doubling our capacity when both units are operating at the same time.

The addition of a second unit occurred in three separate phases. Phase 1 allowed for a redesign of the machine layout and labeling automation which elevated bulk output from 23 pounds per minute to 34 pounds per minute, a 48% increase. In phase 2 of implementation, we were able to transition from a 1-pound bag to a 2-pound bag, escalating total output from 34 pounds per minute to 50 pounds per minute. The third and final phase involved introducing pre-printed film for tandem operation of both bulk units at the same time, effectively doubling capacity to 100 pounds per minute.

“Collectively, these enhancements to our bulk room operation and expansion of run times are substantially enhancing our capacity to serve others by taking our total output of 1.3 million pounds per year to what will now be approximately 5.9 million pounds per year,” said Seth Hatsfelt, Chief Operations Officer. “This

expanded capacity not only allows us to provide more product to our clients but also allows us to extend support to other food banks in our region, offering Louisiana rice at a more competitive rate than the open market.”

Leveraging these newfound speeds with procuring more bulk product and unwavering support from our volunteers will allow us to continue to reach more families in need while also fostering collaborative opportunities within our Food Bank community.

Want to see how the bulk packaging machine works first-hand? We offer volunteer shifts online for people who want to spend time volunteering at our warehouse facility. We would love to give you a tour and show you what it is all about. Visit us at brfoodbank.org to learn more.

NUTRITION PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: CREATE BETTER HEALTH



In the past year, our nutrition department has expanded their programs, adding 3 new nutrition class opportunities. The Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank now offers a host of nutrition classes including Pick a Better Snack, Pick It. Try It. Like It., 10 Tips for Adults, Nutrition Pantry Program and Create Better Health.

One of the newer classes that has received excellent feedback is Create Better Health. This class consists of an 8-month curriculum with 1 class a month that takes a holistic approach to improving the nutrition and physical activity-related knowledge, skills, and self-efficacy of SNAP-Ed eligible adults to lead an active and healthy lifestyle with limited resources.

Create Better Health emphasizes improving food resource management through using “Create” concepts that teach participants how to use foods they already have in their kitchen to create a variety of nourishing meals. Each class consists of three parts: a nutrition topic, a physical activity discussion, and a cooking demonstration.

The concepts teach participants how to make different dishes like “Create a Casserole,” “Create a Skillet Meal,” and “Create a Stir Fry.” Participants receive a handout that breaks the recipe up into different food groups such as grain, protein, vegetable, sauce, etc.

From there, the participants can see what they have in their pantry and can customize it to their preferences to make a meal they

know they will enjoy. By breaking down the dish by food groups, the concepts not only provide them with a recipe but also teach them the skillset of grocery shopping and meal planning.

The physical activity portion of the class is meant to educate participants on the benefits of being active, show them ways to be active, and set goals. There is a focus on teaching participants that physical activity doesn’t have to be a chore, but it can be something they already enjoy doing or small changes to their everyday lives.

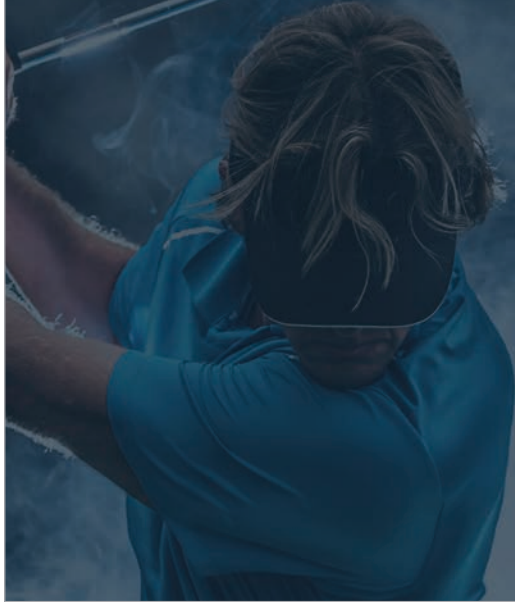
The class concludes with a cooking demonstration that uses the “Create” concept to make a meal for the participants to taste.

Since the implementation of Create Better Health, the classes have received positive feedback. Many of the participants have told Food Bank staff teaching the classes that they have been inspired by the “Create” concepts to make meals at home and when grocery shopping.

Participants have reported trying new foods and getting their children to try new foods by using the recipes provided.

Create Better Health is one of our many nutrition classes offered that aims to teach people how to live a healthy lifestyle and create healthy dietary patterns.

SLICE OF LIFE GOLF CLASSIC PRESENTED BY THE JOE BURROW FOUNDATION – MAY 20TH



After a multi-year hiatus following the COVID shutdown of 2019, we are pleased to announce the return of the Slice of Life Golf Classic to benefit the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank. What began almost 30 years ago, is fortunate to be back on golfers' calendars thanks to the many sponsors including this year's presenting sponsor, The Joe Burrow Foundation.

You may recall that Joe Burrow, LSU's Heisman Trophy winner and National Champion Quarterback, gave an impassioned speech on the impacts of food insecurity and what he experienced growing up in Ohio where many of his peers needed food assistance. Since that speech, Joe has taken many steps over the last few years to give back to communities around the country through his foundation, The Joe Burrow Foundation.

This year's Slice of Life Golf Classic will be held on Monday, May 20th at Pelican Point Country Club in Gonzales. The four-man scramble will tee off at 10am with registration beginning at 8:30am and an awards dinner following play. This year's clubhouse and dinner sponsor will be the Lineage Foundation for Good.

Players will receive a premium gift bag upon registration thanks to Williamson Eye Center, Gold Star Trophies, Ochsner Health and Lineage. We would also like to thank all our major sponsors including TPS Gulf Southeast, Associated Packaging, Arkel Constructors, Sigma Engineers & Constructors, and Smith Tank and Steel, Inc. Without our sponsors, we could not do what we do.

Funds raised from this year's golf classic will go a long way in helping us acquire more food for the upcoming summer months when food is needed most. We are welcoming new team registrations on a first-come first-served basis until the field is full, and hole sponsorships are also available. To learn more about the tournament and register, visit brfoodbank.org/slice-of-life/.

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