

# Harvest News



A publication of

**Food Bank of North Alabama**

## Community Strides Against Child Hunger

"The fact that one child in north Alabama is hungry—let alone over 59,000—is antithetical to our values; it is a threat to that child, and it will cost our community a far greater price than it would take to meet that child's most basic need for sustenance and care," said Kathryn Strickland, Executive Director of the Food Bank, to a crowd of nearly 200 participants at a recent symposium in Huntsville. People came from Rainsville, Muscle Shoals and other communities across the Tennessee Valley to listen, share, and take concrete action to help end child hunger in north Alabama.

The symposium, titled *Close the Gap: Ending Child Hunger in North Alabama*, was the culmination of a six-month effort by the Food Bank and generous co-sponsors **Wells Fargo; Venturi Aerospace, Inc.; Alabama State Representative Jim Patterson of District 21; and the Jackson Center** to address the destructive regional problem of child hunger. "Sometimes, as a community, it can be hard to know where to start when addressing such a big problem, but I knew we could come together to help," says **Stephen Norris**, North Alabama and Tennessee Area President of **Wells Fargo**, reflecting on the effort. "When Wells Fargo was presented with the opportunity to financially support the Food Bank and the work they are doing to end child hunger, it was a no-brainer for us. We said yes." Making the symposium a logistical reality was the effort of an energetic steering committee

comprised of volunteers from such diverse organizations as Leadership Huntsville, Manna House, BB&T Bank, Asbury United Methodist Church, the Alabama Credit Union, the CARE Center, Progress Bank, Children First, and Huntsville City Schools.

Jon West, Director of Community-Building at the Atlanta Community Food Bank, set the theme and the tone for the day in a moving keynote speech. "Childhood hunger isn't out there somewhere affecting the lives of people that we don't know and that we're not connected to; it has come to live among us," he said. "It is shaping our communities—both their present potential and their future hopes—in profoundly disturbing ways. Childhood hunger is a community problem... and as a result we all pay the costs." To the crowd, well-versed in the causes of hunger and the various programs commonly employed in fighting it, this was no revelation. But the master stroke that followed offered an empowering perspective. The real solution, West said, is already present in every community. Every community has its own unique assets, people, and relationships. A community might solicit help from concerned outsiders, but no solution will work without the investment of the community itself. Internal focus is the key. To solidify the point, he offered a mantra and had the audience repeat it: "My community is gifted. My community is smart. My community is connected." Following Mr. West were three panels

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### Want to Help?

*Want to learn what you can do to help end child hunger? Or how to find out which neighborhoods need a food pantry or a school backpack program? Visit [www.closehungergap.org](http://www.closehungergap.org). This on-line resource hosted by the Food Bank of North Alabama is a one-stop clearinghouse for information about and solutions to end child hunger in north Alabama.*

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- Jon West



Keynote speaker Jon West from the Atlanta Community Food Bank.

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# Farmer Profile

## Deep Roots and a Secret Ingredient

"There was no way in the world you were going to get me to go to that farm after I graduated from high school," says Will Scott, one of the youngest family members who own and operate Scott's Orchard in Hazel Green, AL.

Will, who will soon graduate college with a degree in information systems, thought, "Who wants to work outside when it's 110 degrees? Who wants to be a farmer? But then I went to the Greene Street Farmers Market...I sold 40 baskets of peaches in 25 minutes!" The buzz and sense of community at the market hooked him. "It drew me back into the farm," he says.

At 21, Will is fully wired-in. With phone in hand and a tablet computer never far from reach, he looks like a pilot in a cockpit—receiving texts, referencing weather reports, checking his calendar—all without losing the thread of conversation. When asked about the incongruity between careers in information systems and farming, he reveals a wisdom beyond his years. "Farming is a whole lot of technology," he explains. "We look at weather reports, research chemicals; that's all technology. To be efficient, you've gotta use everything that you can. For example, a GPS-guided tractor can reduce overlap when you're tilling a field and will end up saving you diesel... But you're right, there's nothing technological about growing an apple or a peach. That's tradition."

Tradition. It's an ingredient that no technology, fertilizer, or supplement can match. Scott's Orchards has those deep roots of tradition. A century deep. Will quickly and selflessly acknowledges his reliance on his family's 113-year tradition. "I see myself using all of my knowledge," he says, "but there's still so much to learn about farming. When it comes to pests and all your different plant diseases that you might see only once every 10 to 20 years, I haven't been exposed to hardly any of those yet." This is when he relies on his family's careful record keeping. "We can go back and pull my great-grandfather's journals out, and we can recall the weather temperatures and patterns for his entire life. It's really awesome to say, 'Well, he took care of that one for us.' I can't describe how great it is, the perks of working for your family."

Will tries to extend that same family intimacy to his customers. "It may just be apples and peaches," he says, "but in my mind, we grow the best apples and peaches. It's our family's joy, and we do this because we want to share our joy with everybody else's family."

Will has worked closely with the Food Bank as a farmer-member of the North Alabama Farm Food Collaborative. The Collaborative is a local food hub facilitated by the Food Bank that connects local farmers to local buyers such as schools and grocery stores. Last season, Scott's Orchards had a bumper crop of apples. Rather than sell the surplus to additional markets, Will had the greater good in mind. He shared thousands upon thousands of pounds of apples with the Food Bank and Society of St. Andrew. When he learned that the apples would go to elementary school children enrolled in weekend backpack programs, he personally hand-washed them to ensure their quality. That's the kind of person Will is. We are fortunate that youthful farmers like Will are choosing to uphold our region's long tradition of caring not only for our lands but also our neighbors.

*Will Scott of Scott's Orchards.*





# Community Strides...

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Nearly 200 attended the Closing the Hunger Gap Symposium.

of presenters who discussed their experiences in relieving child hunger from different angles: summer feeding programs, school-based backpack programs, and emergency food pantries.

## Summer Feeding Programs

Laura Lester, Executive Director of the Alabama Association of Food Banks, began by describing how only 7.9% of Alabama students who qualify for free or reduced meals at school have access to free meals over the summer. Joseph Vaughn, Child Nutrition Program Director of Huntsville City Schools, concluded by sharing the stunning success of his district's new feeding program that served over 98,000 meals during the last summer break.

## Backpack Programs

Kayce Bell, COO of the Alabama Credit Union, and Sally Warden, Assistant Director of the Asbury United Methodist Church Food Pantry, discussed the evolution of small weekend feeding programs (commonly called "backpack" programs) in a few schools into a massive, coordinated operation spanning three counties.

## Emergency Food Pantries

Tanya Rains, Executive Director of Upper Sand Mountain Parish, and Wanda Lyda, Chairperson of the Flatrock Community Center, shared poignant stories about how their food pantries meet the needs of families facing a range of issues including factory



Grant Baird, a symposium steering committee member.

shutdowns, the 2011 tornado disaster, and unexpected winter weather that closes schools and children's access to meals.

The positive momentum at the symposium crested during the round-table discussions. Attendees networked with each other and brainstormed how to begin, expand or collaborate on community-based solutions to hunger.

"There was so much energy and enthusiasm. All of us who hold the vision of eliminating child hunger were able to share experiences and learn from each other," said Sally Warden afterward.

At the day's close, Strickland commented, "A colleague once asked if I truly believed we could end child hunger. I answered, 'Absolutely!' Given our region's legacy of Wernher von Braun, we know that, when we have the collective will to do so, we can reach a goal as ambitious as landing a man on the moon. Ending child hunger is simply a moon-shot aimed at our own backyard."

Special thanks to the committed members of the symposium's steering committee who made it all possible: **Marie Arighi, Grant Baird, Gene Bowman, Jojo Campbell, Fran Fluhler, Elizabeth Fleming, Andrea Hatfield, Derek Johns, Toni Jones, Daniel Kasambira, Laura Lester, Kerry Malone, Stephen Norris, Rick Pender, Tanya Rains, Pat Simms, Michelle Skelton, Jason Vandiver, Sally Warden, and Jeffrey Wilson.**



Dennis Madson, Huntsville's long range planner, and Xantheia Walkins, AA&M student, listen to panelists.



Joseph Vaughn shares the details of about what will make summer feeding programs successful.

## Quick Disaster Response

Tension mounted during the week of April 27th as a series of strong spring thunderstorms barreled their way across Arkansas and Mississippi toward Alabama. Following emergency response protocol, the Food Bank of North Alabama waited on stand-by, watching the weather reports closely and making sure their disaster-relief inventory was ready for immediate deployment. They drew from long experience, especially the recent lessons they learned from the historic tornadoes that struck Alabama in April 2011.

So when tornadoes touched down in north central Alabama on Tuesday evening, April 29th, causing widespread damage, the Food Bank sprang into action. Almost 60,000 lbs. of bottled water, emergency meals, peanut butter, cereal, hygiene kits, diapers, and detergent were sent by the truckload to centers of disaster relief operation in Limestone, Madison, Marshall, and DeKalb Counties.



*Limestone County Churches Involved unpacks the Food Bank's delivery from the Alabama Peanut Growers Association.*

**Our gratitude goes out to the following agencies, companies, and churches for making this mission effective:**

*Taft Full Gospel Church  
Limestone County EMA  
Little Ezekiel M.B. Church  
Clements Baptist Church  
Huntsville Dream Center*

*Florence Blvd. M.B. Church  
Limestone County Churches Involved  
CASA of Dekalb County  
Byler Road Church of Christ  
Marshall County Christian Services*

## Letter Carriers' Food Drive Delivers



If you took the time to reach into your pantry, fill bags of food, and hang them on your mailbox on May 10th, the day before Mother's Day, we want to say, "THANK YOU!"

You made the 22nd annual 'Stamp Out Hunger' Food Drive hosted by the National Association of Letter Carriers a huge success! This event, held nationwide, collects tens of millions of pounds of non-perishable food every year and delivers it to participating charities like the Food Bank of North Alabama. This year our local post offices collected 143,320 pounds of food in the Food Bank's 11-county region in north Alabama. Thank you again to all the letter carriers who volunteered and everyone who donated!

## Special Recognition Donations

### In Honor of

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### In Memory of

My Mother  
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*By William Bailey*  
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