

On A Mission To Rescue The North Fork's Food

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As we head into a season of plenty, an intricate web of volunteers stands at the ready on the North Fork to make sure the food produced here doesn't go to waste.

They're part of the new Food Rescue US North Fork chapter, organized by North Forkers Anne Howard and Stephanie McEvily, working to connect businesses and institutions that have too much food with people who need it —from little neighborhood free pantries to soup kitchens and large established pantries where lines stretch down the block when food is being distributed.

The group has saved more than 4,000 pounds of food since the beginning of the year, much of it in bagels, thanks to a steady supply from Signature Bagels in Riverhead and Goldberg's in Riverhead and Mattituck, said the organizers at a meet and greet May 22 at Golden Acres Organic Farm in Jamesport, formerly the Golden Earthworm Organic Farm.

“The farms have produce through Thanksgiving, but wintertime is very difficult,” said Ms. Howard as the organizers urged volunteers to help build a network of farms that need help getting their extra produce to people who need it.

Food Rescue US — North Fork is a network of just over 40 volunteers who give a little bit of their time to move food, but many of them hadn’t met in person until the meet and greet.



The crowd at the May 22 Meet and Greet, at which many of the volunteers got to meet one another for the first time.

Food Rescue US works primarily through a smartphone app, where people who have food upload information to the app, and volunteers agree to pick it up and take it where it’s needed, a philanthropic twist on apps like DoorDash.

On the North Fork, Ms. Howard and Ms. McEvily have started out with a more hands-on approach, introducing donors to the volunteers and building relationships, and then entering the weight of the food collected into the app manually.

Ms. Howard and Ms. McEvily met while working together on CAST’s capital campaign in Southold, and when that was done, they were introduced to people who were interested in starting a North Fork chapter of Food Rescue US, thinking they would lend their help to getting the chapter off the ground.

When they started, Ms. Howard envisioned they would be redistributing primarily produce, but in the lean winter months, they've found a core of donors including the Mattituck and Southold 7-Elevens, which donate prepackaged sandwiches at the end of the day, prepackaged food from Stony Brook Eastern Long Island Hospital's cafeteria, goodfood. in Mattituck, and the bagels.

The sandwiches are greatly appreciated by working parents, who don't always have time to cook, said Ms. McEvily.

The operation has turned out to be very hands-on, and very local.

Food Rescue US partners with large grocery and big box chains throughout the United States, but on Long Island Island Harvest and L.I. Cares already have established relationships with large food retailers.

While the Food Rescue chapter does bring some produce to CAST in Southold, CAST already has an established network of farms and food retailers that donate to its pantry, said the organizers. The North Fork chapter is currently dedicating its efforts to providing food to pantries and soup kitchens in Riverhead, where the need is great. They currently bring food to nine food banks from as far east as North Fork Parish Outreach in Southold to Riverhead's First Baptist Church, Salvation Army and Riverhead's First Congregational Church's soup kitchen.

Volunteers Diane Marzec and John Rozzo were surprised when they began delivering food to see how great the need has been.

"At our first drop-off, at a church, there were hundreds of cars, and we thought it was a big party, but it was everyone in line waiting for food," said Mr. Rozzo. "They told us most of them were single moms and their families. I grew up here, and I've never seen this before."

"Forty to 50 percent of our food goes to the landfill, but it's shocking how many people don't have enough food on their table in Nassau and Suffolk County," said Ms. Marzac.

She said she's found unique ways to keep food from going to waste, including at the assisted living facility where her mother lives, which had an excess of beautifully packaged holiday cookies this past December. She offered to bring them to a soup kitchen for a special treat.

Holly Cato, of Greenport, has been helping the group build a micro-network in Greenport, including at ELIH, local delis and bakeries.

“Blue Duck may call and say we have seven sandwiches — it can be a small donation, but because of them, someone is eating who otherwise might not,” she said.

To date, she said the hospital has donated more than 400 pounds of prepared food, including salads, muffins and bread, to CAST through Food Rescue.

Mary and Emery Korpi began volunteering in March, and they’ve primarily been delivering huge bags of bagels to smaller locations, like group homes in Riverhead and Mastic, and the Maureen’s Haven winter homeless shelter network. It doesn’t take much of their time, they said, and they’ve found it very fulfilling.

“There’s a need,” said Ms. Korpi, who said she’s excited about getting involved with delivering produce from farms this summer.

“When I walk in with a big sack of bagels, I feel like Santa Claus,” said Mr. Korpi.



Mary & Emery Korpi with bagels and baking soda provided by the food rescue chapter to keep volunteers' cars from always smelling like everything bagels.

Kelly Brennan, the new owner and a longtime employee at Golden Acres Organic Farm (and formerly Golden Earthworm), has been donating food through the program since its inception.

Food Rescue volunteer Maria Pietromonaco, who lives down the street, showed up at the farm on her bicycle and asked if she could help redistribute produce

“It was nice that we didn’t have to deliver it,” she said of the collaboration.

“This doesn’t work without volunteers,” said Ms Howard. “You’re helping people who are food insecure, and you’re also helping the environment. Because of you, North Forkers have less hunger.”

To find out how you can get involved, visit www.facebook.com/FoodRescueUSNorthForkNY or [@foodrescueusnorthforkny](https://www.instagram.com/foodrescueusnorthforkny) on Instagram.