



Community cooperative • Feeding People. Nourishing Lives.

FOOD for THOUGHT

2020: A YEAR TO REMEMBER

Community Cooperative, like so many other businesses and organizations, had high hopes for 2020. The organization was running full steam ahead with growing programs, client success was at an all-time high, the new Community Market and social services offices had just opened, volunteers were abundant, and the annual Soup Kitchen Benefit had just raised a record-setting \$1 million! Eight days later, the coronavirus pandemic forced the closure of schools and the world as we knew it came to a screeching halt.



**TURN TO PAGE 4 /
TO READ MORE !**



HOPE KEEPS ROLLING WITH MEALS ON *wheels*

Ensuring that homebound senior citizens were not forgotten during the coronavirus shutdowns was top of mind for Community Cooperative. When many other senior feeding programs were closing and limiting services due to lack of funding or volunteers, Community Cooperative doubled down and grew their Meals on Wheels program by 20%. "Right as the coronavirus shutdowns began, we were in the process of finalizing a merger with Meals on Wheels of Bonita Springs," said Tracey Galloway, CEO of Community Cooperative.

"It certainly was a challenge to be expanding services into Bonita Springs and north Collier County while at the same time trying to figure out how we were going to manage the uptick in phone calls and inquiries for seniors in need during the

early days of the coronavirus shutdowns." Homebound, food insecure seniors make up most of the 1,000 individuals served by the program every year, but also includes individuals with disabilities or severe illnesses. "It was a scary time for the elderly so we did everything we could to ensure them that we would not stop delivering their meals," Tracey said.

George Sand is one of those clients who was very concerned about his well-being at the beginning of the coronavirus shutdowns. "I was afraid that no one would be able to get food to me. I can't drive or cook for myself so it worried me how I was going to survive," said George. "If it weren't for volunteers like Grace I might not be here right now."

Grace Martin, age 84, has been delivering meals for over 15 years and has been George's peace of mind during uncertain

times. "I call them my people," Grace said. "I like to be there for someone."

It's the nearly 400 Meals on Wheels volunteers like Grace who keep the Meals on Wheels program rolling through good times and bad. With 32 daily delivery routes reaching from Lehigh to Cape Coral down to Bonita Springs and at least 42 volunteers per day to prepare, pack and deliver the meals, it's imperative that the volunteer pipeline stay full. Volunteers drove over 120,000 miles delivering food to homebound seniors last year.

"It's such an important program," Tracey said. "Meals on Wheels can't afford to be shuttered even for a day. There are too many fragile, homebound senior citizens whose lives depend on Community Cooperative and our dedicated volunteers who care deeply for their wellbeing."

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About Community Cooperative

Community Cooperative works to effectively eliminate hunger and homelessness in Lee County while simultaneously inspiring and supporting sustained positive change in its clients by delivering innovative food, education and social service programs.

With a dedicated team of volunteers, board of directors and staff, Community Cooperative stays committed to its core responsibility to collect and distribute resources through a strong and viable network of community partners. Community Cooperative is an exemplary steward of the resources entrusted to them and serves its clients with compassion and integrity. Through collaboration and ongoing education, Community Cooperative supports and strengthens those whose lives have been affected by hunger and homelessness, ensuring that they have access to the resources necessary to transform their lives with dignity.

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GRATITUDE & GENEROSITY

I am the type of person who naturally seeks to find a silver lining in times of stress and change. When the pandemic disrupted our personal routines and business norms, it took a minute — okay a couple weeks — to figure out where a silver lining was going to be found in this mess! Any bursts of optimism, however, were clouded by the ever-present anxiety about a future to be defined by what we were losing — the ability to see each other in person, shake hands, or embrace. This personal interaction is what Community Cooperative's entire mission is built on so I was naturally concerned with how we could move forward in a positive and effective way.

As my slight panic set in about how our little staff of 22 was going to be able to keep up with the instant and overwhelming demand for serving the thousands upon thousands of people who were immediately impacted by the COVID-19 shutdowns, the silver lining started to appear.

Our community rose to levels of support



we've never seen with any other crisis. Not only with financial support but with handwritten notes of encouragement and deep empathy for the circumstances our neighbors were facing, as well as for the hard work and sacrifice of our staff and volunteers. My panic of having no volunteers evolved quickly into stress

of how we could appropriately schedule everyone that reached out to help - what a wonderful problem to have! The enriched collaboration with other organizations, both public and private, to ensure that we were able to get food and other services to the people who were in need was nothing short of astounding.

There are no words that can explain the deep amount of gratitude that I have for every single person who has been a part of Community Cooperative's epic response to this pandemic. Thank you just doesn't seem to be enough.

It is inevitable that we will continue to redefine how we do business to keep up with our ever-changing world, and I will continue to look for the silver linings and be grateful for you and every single person who has a hand in Community Cooperative's success.



TRACEY GALLOWAY, CEO

VETERANS AFFAIRS AWARD

Community Cooperative took its first veteran focused mobile food pantry to the Lee County Veterans Affairs (VA) Clinic in Cape Coral in the spring of 2017.

As lines grew longer and longer each month it became apparent that one food pantry per month wasn't enough to serve the need in the veteran community.

Supporters like the Bonita Bay Veterans Council stepped up to provide Community Cooperative

the funds needed to add a second mobile food pantry at the VA which now assists over 500 veterans per month. "Whether it's the 30-year-old Marine who served in Afghanistan or the 92-year-old WWII army vet, I have to take pause every time I see



these American heroes standing in line for food assistance," said Stefanie Edwards, COO of Community Cooperative.

Community Cooperative was honored with the inaugural Bay Pines Director's Cup for service to Southwest Florida's veterans. This is the first public private partnership geared toward food assistance at the Lee County VA Clinic. The Bay Pines VA Healthcare System, with headquarters in Bay Pines near

St. Petersburg, runs nine facilities serving more than 108,000 veterans in 10 counties in central Southwest Florida. In patients treated or served, the system is the fourth busiest VA Healthcare system in the country.

LIGHTING UP *lives*

Florida Power & Light and Community Cooperative gave clients one thing they wish for during hurricane season — peace of mind.

Volunteers from both organizations participated in their second annual hurricane kit-packing event prior to hurricane season. They packed

up crackers, soup, water and other shelf-stable products for more than 350 seniors who were homebound due to disabilities or other circumstances.

"Many of our clients don't have the ability to get out and buy the essentials needed to prepare for a hurricane," said Rebecca Busby, Food Programs Manager. "This gives them three days of life-saving resources."



PLATE IT up!

Local chefs have joined Community Cooperative for a fun, new initiative called the Plate It Up! Chef Challenge, a video series challenging area chefs to create dishes using ingredients donated to Community Cooperative. Each year, Community Cooperative receives thousands of pounds of donated food and food rescue items. When the team in the Community Café kitchen receives donations, they must get creative to prepare meals. This requires quick thinking and ingenuity to make the best use of ingredients with little food waste so they can feed their hungry clients. In the Plate It Up! Chef Challenge video series, viewers see local chefs work to create a meal or dessert with donated items pulled straight from the Community Market. The chefs are unaware of their mystery ingredients and must quickly decide how to incorporate each item into their creation with only 30 minutes on the clock. The final dish is served to local celebrity tasters who judge based on taste and use of all ingredients. Chef Harold Balink and Chef Norman Love were the first to step up to the challenge.

"As a chef, I'm always up for a challenge in the kitchen and it's an honor to participate. The Plate It Up! Chef Challenge is a fun, engaging way to raise awareness for the ways Community Cooperative is stepping up to the plate to feed those affected by hunger and homelessness," said Chef



Harold Balink of Harold's Restaurant, who was Community Cooperative's first chef to take the challenge.

"For years, we have been proud supporters of Community Cooperative by donating to special events and the Food Rescue Program, and my wife, Mary, volunteers as well," said Norman Love, founder of Norman Love Confections. "As a participating chef, the Plate It Up! Chef Challenge allowed me to be creative and have fun in the kitchen while giving me a glimpse into the challenges that the Community Cooperative chefs face. Right now, we recognize the increase in the number of people in our community who are hungry and we all need to rise to the challenge."

Each of the episodes of the Plate It Up! Chef Challenge help bring awareness to Community Cooperative's mission in a new and exciting way and can be found at www.CommunityCooperative.com.

Hosting a

FOOD DRIVE

with Community Cooperative

1. Schedule a Tour or Guest Speaker:

Schedule a tour for your group to come see the impact your donation will have at the Community Café and Market, or have a representative come to you to share more about the organization. It's important to understand the "why" behind the food drive.

2. Choose Your Dates: The perfect time for a food drive is NOW. Select a start and end date that gives donors enough time to contribute.

3. Secure Support: Make sure your corporation, church, school or organization's top management has endorsed your food drive and will do everything they can to help promote, organize, execute, and celebrate it!

4. Register Your Food Drive: Download the food drive registration form online and return the completed form to Community Cooperative by fax or email.

5. Set a Delivery or Pick-Up Date: Designate support personnel within your group who will be transportation volunteers and schedule a delivery date with Community Cooperative, or a pick-up date if volunteers are unavailable.

6. Print the Wish List: Download the Food Drive Wish List from the website and share with everyone involved.

7. Plan Your Collection: Designate a location to collect the food, the container the donations will be put in, and set up a secure cash box for cash and check donations if you so choose.

8. Set Your Goal: Decide how many pounds of food or how many items you want to collect, and don't be afraid to think big! Set a goal and advertise it so that supporters have a number to aim for.

9. Spread the Word: Promote your food drive via emails, social media, posters, flyers, etc.

10. Have Fun: Get creative in how you collect donations – consider competitions between departments or other companies, take pictures of donors with their donations, or add a theme to the food drive to draw more attention.

11. Deliver the Food: Have your transportation volunteers ready to deliver the donations to Community Cooperative on your scheduled date at the downtown Fort Myers location.

12. Celebrate!: You have truly made a difference in countless lives by hosting a food drive, and THAT deserves celebration!

Be sure to share photos and stories from your food drive with Community Cooperative. View the complete guide to hosting a food drive and more tips and tricks at www.CommunityCooperative.com.

Flipping out for fruits & veggies

Community Cooperative has folded something delicious into the lives of preschool students: fruits and veggies.

Food Literacy in Preschool (FLIP) was launched six years ago. The goal of the program is to educate and expose children — and their families — to a variety of nutritional foods so they can make healthy choices.

"FLIP helps introduce our children to fruits and vegetables they may not have been exposed to, if it were not for this program," said Chris Hansen, CEO of Childcare of Southwest Florida. "Kids need to have the energy and focus to learn and that comes from healthy eating."

Teachers and volunteers work with low-income preschool programs including Joseph H. Messina Children's Center and P.A. Geraci Child Development Center in Fort Myers to educate students about nutrition. Many of the



students are trying some of the fruits and vegetables for the first time.

"We want to teach them that healthy food can be tasty and fun," said Tracey Galloway, CEO of Community Cooperative. "We want to break the cycle of childhood obesity due to food insecurity and poor food choices."

Each fruit or vegetable becomes its own lesson. The students sing songs about oranges, read books about how they are grown, and sample different varieties.

"FLIP acts as a learning lab and helps foster best practices for nutritional education," Chris said. "Not only do they introduce the new items to the kids, they make learning fun with books, coloring sheets, activities and games. The program fits perfectly into the Creative Play Curriculum used at all Child

Care of SW Florida centers. I'm hopeful that the nutritional piece translates into a healthier lifestyle for all of these children and their families."

BUSINESS *as*

COMMUNITY
Impact
In one year



105,000

meals to homebound elderly,
disabled & ill clients through
Meals On Wheels



174,000

people helped through
our many programs



34,000

hours given by 2,400 active
volunteers



2.2 MILLION

pounds of emergency food
distributed to our local community



246,000

meals cooked & served in our
Community Café kitchen

* 2020 Annualized

C

ommunity Cooperative is not immune to preparing and reacting quickly to natural disasters but there was

no playbook for this crisis. There was very little time to prepare as hunger and homelessness don't go away when crisis arises, so as every great organization would do - they ran full steam ahead into the uncertainty and created the plan as they went without missing a beat.

With hands gloved, faces masked, and social distancing protocols in place, the Community Café moved to to-go style meals, social services learned to help clients via Zoom calls, Meals on Wheels adjusted its delivery methods to safely ensure every homebound senior in need still received their meals, and the mobile food pantries moved to a drive-thru model with double the locations to



meet the need. The dedicated staff and volunteers at Community Cooperative kept moving forward under extraordinary



circumstances, in new and creative ways, to ensure people remained fed with a roof over their heads during the pandemic.



STAFF SUPERHERDES

This year has been challenging for everyone and Community Cooperative staff have witnessed the struggle firsthand. In fact, the 22 staff members at Community Cooperative have spent more time and energy on the job over the last several months than they'd probably care to admit.

Since they are considered essential workers bringing necessary food and resources to the community, their work not only didn't stop, but it increased significantly. When the need for food assistance tripled, mobile food pantries doubled, and food production for Meals

on Wheels and the Community Café increased, staff members learned to push through the exhaustion to make sure those in need receive the help they can't get anywhere else.

"It's hard work, but the work is worth it," said Jazzy Proctor, Development & Events Coordinator at Community Cooperative. "As events have been put on hold, our entire team from social services to finance shifted their focus to food distribution making sure we helped the thousands of men, women and children in our community who are hurting right now."

Tons and tons of food have funneled

through Community Cooperative over the course of the pandemic. Whether from bulk orders, local farmers, food rescue partners or food drives, staff members are constantly moving food to make room for the next delivery and getting food items out the door almost as quickly as they arrive.

"I admire every one of our staff members," said Tracey Galloway, CEO. "It's been humbling to see our staff rise up with so much heart and dedication to help so many people throughout our community. I couldn't be prouder to be a part of this incredible team during this pandemic and beyond."

Un-USUAL



HUNGER RELIEF *pandemic* STYLE

Five months into 2020, Community Cooperative had already surpassed the 10,943 total number of unduplicated households served through mobile pantries which marked a record in 2019. More fresh produce, meat, and dairy products were provided to more clients than ever before due to increased need amidst the coronavirus pandemic.

In a normal year, the program hosts eight food pantries throughout Lee County where it provides emergency

groceries for hundreds of households per month. The organization quickly began seeing the growing need for assistance once the pandemic hit and worked to build new partnerships with local schools and organizations willing to serve as mobile pantry sites. By April of 2020, Community Cooperative had doubled the number of mobile food pantry sites in an effort to reach those struggling in the community. Typically, the mobile food pantry program targets under-served neighborhoods where there is high food insecurity. The new mobile pantry sites

added, as a result of the pandemic, are centrally located so anyone struggling to make ends meet can easily access the assistance, and the numbers of those attending skyrocketed.

"The continual growth shows just how many people need food assistance in Lee County, and underscores the importance of Community Cooperative's mission," says Rebecca Busby, Food Programs Manager for Community Cooperative.

COVID-19 protocol shifted the mobile pantry from a walk-up to a drive-thru model to limit person-to-person contact.

Clients stay in their cars while volunteers place grocery items directly in the trunks of vehicles.

As is the case with most programs at Community Cooperative, volunteers are an integral part of the mobile pantries each month, especially during these times. "They really put their heart into serving and go above and beyond for our clients," Rebecca said. "The mobile food pantries offer food, social services support, and volunteers who are always willing to share words of encouragement and a smile that not even a face mask can hide."

Pets GET HUNGRY, TOO!



Gulf Coast Humane Society, longtime partner of Community Cooperative, helped in relief efforts for the four-legged family members during the pandemic. Staff and volunteers of GCHS have attended over 60 mobile food pantries and distributed over 18 tons of pet food.

WASH, DRY, FOLD, REPEAT *Giving Back One Load At A Time*

Volunteers, over 3,000 of them, dedicate their time and energy to helping those less fortunate in the community and truly are the hands and feet of Community Cooperative. That never-ending dedication and drive has not subsided this year amidst COVID-19. Many volunteers have continued working right through the pandemic to ensure services never stopped.

Helen Fisher, age 86, is one of these brave volunteers who gives her time twice a week, in the early mornings, to help in the Community Café. Her duties range from cooking food for Meals on Wheels, serving lunch in the Community Café, and folding seemingly endless piles of aprons and dish rags for use in the kitchen.

"I raised three sons, so I'm a bit overqualified for this job!" Helen laughed. She moved to Fort Myers in

1981 and has been volunteering with Community Cooperative consistently for the last twelve years. She says that when the coronavirus hit, she had no hesitations to keep coming back to volunteer. "Of course I take precautions, but we've got to keep moving," she said. "I wanted to keep helping and doing my part."

Rachell Mays, Volunteer Services

Coordinator at Community Cooperative, says that volunteers like Helen are a crucial piece to the organization's success. "Our volunteers are such an important part of the work we do," Rachell said. "Volunteers make everything we do possible. During these difficult times, we couldn't meet the need without them."



10 YEARS OF CAN IT!

Food drives are a vital resource for keeping the Community Market shelves full. Each fall since 2010, Pushing the Envelope (PTE) Marketing & Public Relations has hosted their annual CAN IT! Food Drive to support Community Cooperative's holiday outreach and to help meet the increased need around the holidays for food assistance. PTE has partnered with dozens of businesses throughout Lee County providing more than 187 food drive drop-off locations over the years in the month leading up to Thanksgiving.

This year marks 10 years of the CAN IT! Food Drive. "We are overwhelmed by the support of like-minded people who donated and served as drop off locations, but most pleased to know we've been able to help others during the holiday season," commented Samantha Scott, APR, PTE President.

Over the years, the CAN IT! campaign has donated over 18,100 non-perishable food items totaling more than 16,400 pounds of food to Community Cooperative's Community Market. Their enthusiasm, year after year, to make an impact shines as an example in the community of how working together for a common goal can make a difference in ending hunger. 🌱



LOVE IN motion

While most people are still asleep, Claudette O'Connor arrives promptly at the Community Café before the crack of dawn – to volunteer.

Claudette began volunteering after a friend encouraged her to deliver a Meals on Wheels route. Almost two decades later, she has been one of Community Cooperative's most dedicated volunteers. About 10 years ago, she shifted from delivering Meals on Wheels to helping in the Café in the early mornings – five days a week. She helps package meals for the day's deliveries. Over the years, she has perfected the process, which has made it efficient for the other volunteers.

She enjoys meeting people from all over the country and learning what brought them to Southwest Florida and Community Cooperative.

"The people make volunteering here special, both the staff and the volunteers I get to meet," she said. "We are all like-minded, wanting to help others, which gives us an immediate connection."

She is passionate about volunteering because she understands that her work is life-changing and life-saving.

"Many clients would not survive, or at least not very well, without this organization," she said. "Meals on Wheels clients literally can't do some things without us. They rely on us to provide the basic need of food."

Tracey Galloway, CEO of Community Cooperative, says the agency could not succeed without dedicated volunteers.

"Passionate volunteers like Claudette are the heart and soul of this organization," she said. "She reminds everyone that they can make a difference." 🌱



TEE UP AGAINST HUNGER

A group of golfers took a swing for charity and Community Cooperative reaped the benefits.

In March of 2020, Gateway Trinity Lutheran Church held its 9th Annual Golf Tournament at The Club at Gateway in Fort Myers. They raised \$48,000 with a nine-year total of \$311,000. All proceeds were split between The Golisano Children's Hospital of Southwest Florida and Community Cooperative.

About 120 golfers participated, which included 108 hole sponsors and 53 local businesses/families donating raffle items. Gabe Dickson from FGCU's PGA Golf Management program and assistant professional Shane Basso from The Club at Gateway volunteered for the event.

Members of Gateway Trinity Lutheran Church have been actively involved with both organizations for many years.



Volunteer OPPORTUNITIES

Our volunteers dedicate their time to helping those less fortunate in our community. Here are some ways you can give back at Community Cooperative.

- » **Community Cafés- Fort Myers & Fort Myers Beach:** Prepare meals • Package meals • Serve meals • Clean up
- » **Community Markets:** Stock shelves • Distribute groceries
- » **Mobile Food Pantries:** Set up & distribute groceries

- at mobile sites throughout Lee County
- » **Meals on Wheels:** Prepare meals • Deliver meals to elderly shut-ins Monday-Friday. Direct Phone for Meals on Wheels volunteers: 239-337-1055
- » **Able Garden:** Harvest

- produce, plant, prune, weed and other care
- » **Outreach & Special Events:** FLIP (Food Literacy in Preschool) • Café Education-help teach monthly classes
- General administrative assistance • Special events: Soup Kitchen Benefit,

- Becoming Cosmopolitan & more! • Outreach scheduled throughout the year
- » **Monday- Friday volunteer opportunities available** for individuals & groups at Community Cooperative

For more information on how to volunteer, visit online at CommunityCooperative.com/give-help or contact Rachell Mays at 239-332-7687 ext. 100 or Rachell@CommunityCooperative.com



1. Board Chair Keith Banasiak and his children Janeen and Cory volunteering in the Community Market 2. Total Wine Points with a Purpose campaign proceeds being donated to support hunger relief to Tracey Galloway 3. Bonita Springs Estero Realtors donating funds to support mobile food pantry efforts in Bonita Springs to Stefanie Edwards 4. Kayla Peck, Nancy and Frank Aloia at the annual Sam Galloway, Jr. & Friends Soup Kitchen Benefit 5. Volunteer Gerri Buchanan baking up dozens and dozens of muffins in the Community Café kitchen 6. Community Café client enjoying lunch and making art with her dessert 7. Al Plotter from Trafalgar Middle school donating a harvest from their school garden 8. Volunteers with the Lee County Sheriff's Office packing bags with COVID-19 literature to distribute at mobile food pantries 9. Meals on Wheels volunteer Al Torrisi loads meals to be delivered to elderly shut-ins 10. Dane Eagle donating 5,000lbs of potatoes and green beans as a part of pandemic hunger relief efforts 11. Volunteer Pam Fairfax serving lunch in the Community Café 12. Evangelical Christian School varsity football players volunteering in the Community Market 13. Community Cooperative staff & volunteers at the Food Drive Rally hosted by Fort Myers Brewing Company



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*Innovators in the fight to end
hunger and homelessness in our community.*



Community Cafés & Markets • Growing Healthy Kids Programs
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