

OCTOBER 2020 NEWSLETTER ARTICLE

COVID SPURRING COLLABORATIONS

FOOD DISTRIBUTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has hit vulnerable families hardest and many people are struggling to keep food on the table. Feeding America, a national hunger relief organization, estimates there has been a 61 percent increase in food insecurity in the 16-county area served by Second Harvest Food Bank of Southern Wisconsin since the pandemic began. Kris Tazelaar, Director of Marketing and Communications for Second Harvest says from mid-March through mid-September, Second Harvest distributed 420,000 boxes of food. That's a 65 percent increase from the same period last year.

COVID has meant that not only do more people rely on the food supplied by Second Harvest, but the agency needed to change the way it distributed that food.

“Now everything has to be sorted and packed into boxes for no contact distribution. Our fixed warehouse size wasn't big enough,” Tazelaar explained. “We needed to find space for additional food, space to package and maintain social distancing. When COVID hit, we made a phone call and asked, ‘Is there any way you can help us out?’ They said ‘yes, absolutely. We want to help you and the community.’ We simply couldn't help the people we need to without Alliant Energy Center.”

Alliant Energy Center isn't charging Second Harvest any rental fee for the use of the space. And considering how the pandemic has strained the agency's funds, that's important. Tazelaar says that unbudgeted costs during the pandemic have reached \$5.5 million to cover the cost of purchasing additional food and hiring personnel to sort and pack boxes. To put that amount in perspective, Second Harvest's annual budget is usually in the neighborhood of \$6 million.

Food pantries in 16 counties stretching across Southern Wisconsin rely on Second Harvest to supply the food that they pass on to hungry families. Being able to utilize the Alliant Energy Center for sorting, packing and loading trucks means that the supply of food to these pantries and families isn't interrupted. In addition to supplying food to area pantries, Second Harvest also does some direct food distribution through its mobile pantries that travel throughout the area. And when this year's Juneteenth celebration needed to be adjusted, Alliant Energy Center served as the location for approximately 1,000 families to receive boxes of food.

“People lined up in their cars and we put the boxes of food in their trunks. We distributed 100,000 pounds of food in five hours. We were really hustling but it all worked great. We're so thankful for the incredible generosity of the Alliant Energy Center,” Tazelaar explained.