

THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE DIALOGUE

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PROFILE: ISLAND HARVEST SERVING NASSAU AND SUFFOLK INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES IN NEED

*Demonstrating that through volunteer action, individual contributions,
and with generous corporate support and cooperation,
we can help change the face of hunger on Long Island*

Fourteen years ago **Island Harvest** was founded, responding to the growing need for good, nutritious (and fresh) food by Long Islanders in need — and since that time more than 25 tons of food has been distributed to food pantries, soup kitchens and a wide range of other agencies here in Nassau and Suffolk counties. The organization's work is never done: In 2002, 2.5 million tons of food was distributed; this grew to 4 million tons in 2003 and distribution will top 5 million tons this year (2004). Island Harvest's partnerships with local social agencies, churches and other institutions are at the heart of the success of this region-wide program.

Executive Director Randi Shubin Dresner explains that with the success of the organization — and especially its unique methods for gathering and rapidly distributing food — and with the growing need for food by individuals and families in need, even with a loyal corps of 1,000+ volunteers it can be challenging to keep up with servicing the growing demand.

During November, Island Harvest staff (14 in all) and the corps of volunteers are busily soliciting Thanksgiving dinners for families and institutions that feed folks on the holiday. Between now and year-end, over 350,000 pounds of canned and packaged food and 6,000+ turkeys will be gathered and distributed throughout the region!

Food is gathered from all types of facilities, at 500 locations and more — especially local catering halls, immediately following events; also from pizza parlors, bagel shops, food chain outlets, local restaurants, country clubs, hotels, cafeterias, food service companies, and area supermarkets. And, fresh produce and field crops from at least six local farms here on the North Fork! (Thank you, farm families, say the staff and volunteers.)

The **Panera Bread** stores (six now open on Long Island) provide 600 pounds of bread from each store each week, plus donations of cash. **Waldbaum's** has been a generous, long-

term supporter of Island Harvest and literally thousands of Long Islanders have benefited from the supermarket's generosity and concern for its neighbors.

Island Harvest gathers usable food from dozens of locations and distributes food rapidly — most is perishable, so quick transport is critical — to 430 community-based organizations, including agencies here in Riverhead and Southold. (Trucks bring bulk deliveries to downtown Riverhead, to the parking lot behind the Congregational Church, and smaller shipments are then brought to East End agency locations.) Receiving agencies include the familiar food pantries and soup kitchens, and also homes for battered women and neglected children, senior citizen facilities, pre-school Head Start locations (now trending toward serving multiple meals each day to young children, as parents work longer hours and two jobs), day care centers, mental health caregivers, half way houses for released prisoners, and other types of facilities.

Island Harvest's year-round operations are supported by enlightened — and socially responsible — companies here on Long Island. The headquarters facility is in Mineola, on the top floor of a historic bank building donated originally by **EAB Bank**; since the takeover of EAB by **Citibank**, that institution has continued the "free lease" for a spacious office / operations center.

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**Profile: Island Harvest Serving Nassau and Suffolk
Individuals and Families in Need
(continued)**

A number of employers in both counties place large packing barrels that Island Harvest uses for collecting canned and packaged food in strategic locations in various facilities, encouraging employees and in some cases, customers, to contribute.

1-800-Flowers (Westbury) has its employees collecting food in spirited interdepartmental contests – 12,000 pounds this year – and awards trophies to the winning department.

Macy's places barrels in its regional stores and generously contributes cash to Island Harvest.

Symbol Technologies (Suffolk) directly sponsors a special program – a group adult and children who are physically and mentally challenged work in the Mineola offices assembling the packages used for collecting and transporting food (especially metal cooking trays). These are assembled in advance, packaged, sealed and labeled by this special corps of volunteers.

Other companies lending support to Island Harvest – through donations, in-kind services, participation in special drives – include: **Applebee's, Cablevision, Keyspan, Canon, Roslyn Savings Bank, Computer Associates**, both the **NY Mets** and **Islanders** team, and **Northville Industries. The Long Island Radio Group** has been conducting on-site (remote) broadcasts from various locations in both counties in October and November to support local food gathering / fund raising events (over WHLI-AM, WKJY-98.3, WBZO-B103, WMJC-Island 94.3).

Quite literally, a corps of over 1,000 individuals must put their shoulders to the wheel to make Island “work.” Volunteers assist Island Harvest in carrying out its mission in a number of capacities: clerical, a speaker's bureau, materials preparation, and distribution and food pick-up and delivery. Trained volunteers move food from donor to receiving agency. About 300 trained volunteers do these “food runs” (pick up and delivery) in any given week. (Island Harvest has three full-time employee drivers.) Special coolers are used to transport food, in volunteers' passenger cars, pickups and SUVs. More volunteers are always needed (and warmly welcomed).

In the county seat of Mineola, for example, dozens of volunteers working through the **Mineola Courthouse Kiwanis Club** – lawyers, judges, court and law firm employees – whiz around before work, during lunch hours and after work delivering food to local agencies.

Much, much more help is needed. Island Harvest is seeking volunteers, food donors, and receiving agencies in need. Right now, the local agencies need more meat, fish and fowl to feed their clients. Cash is always welcomed! Island Harvest needs to replace trucks in its fleet, and among the vehicles [urgently] sought for 2005 is a 24-foot refrigerated truck.

Most important — If you are aware of a local service agency in need, Island Harvest invites your call so that they can arrange for food deliveries if they meet member agency criteria.

YOU CAN LEARN MORE AT:

www.islandharvest.org
(Island Harvest's Web site)

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The dialogue is intended to help further understanding
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