

ST. MARY'S STORIES

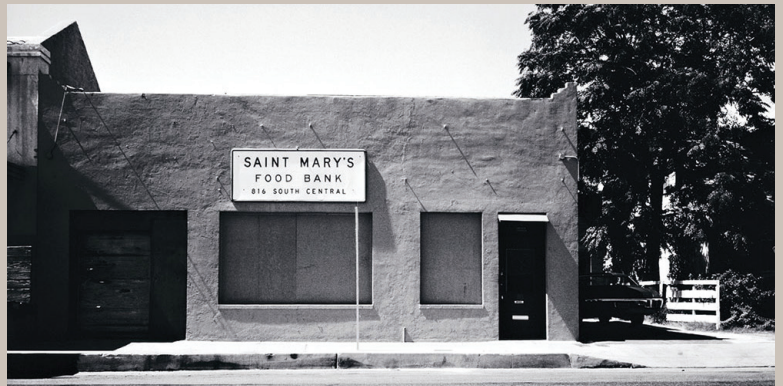
HOW IT STARTED



St. Mary's Food Bank is the world's first food bank (started in 1967), an accomplishment to this day I marvel at. I had the opportunity to spend time with the founder John van Hengel. This is when I learned about Second Harvest, a national food banking system, started by John van Hengel, at the request of the Federal Government. How cool is this, I thought by a guy who chooses to live at a poverty level. I had to ask how this happened, the trips to Washington, hotels, etc.? I learned the Feds paid for everything. I learned John desired the private sector to lead the new organization, as the Feds involved numerous rules and regulations. John thought rules and regulations could limit food banking opportunities.

In my opinion in the '90s as well as currently, St. Mary's Food Bank was/is a model for food collection and food distribution for the country and world.

Did I mention every food bank in the world was modeled after Arizona's St. Mary's Food Bank; no kidding. The Food Bank openly receives out-of-country visitors gleaning insight to successfully running a food bank.



My 20 years and WOODPATEL's 30 years of being associated with St. Mary's Food Bank started small and without knowing where the adventure was taking us. It was the mid '90s, WOODPATEL employed maybe 30 plus people.

The firm had made an unsolicited holiday contribution, to St. Mary's Food Bank (Food Bank). After the second annual contribution, two Food Bank representatives called on me at the office and thanked the firm. I clearly recall it was Paul Barnes, Chief Development Officer, and an associate Rowland Onnk. It was during follow up meetings we started a discussion about an employee-company matching funds program. Our matching contribution program was started and is still ongoing today.

Nonprofits depend on various sources of funds. A reoccurring steady monthly income allows meaningful decisions to be made to serve people suffering from food challenges. It was in this time era that I spent a few years calling on other local businesses and discussing the value of employee involvement for their business and the benefits to our local community.

Paul Barnes actively guided me to the Food Bank's Development Committee (communications & fund raising). I spent 8 years on the Development Committee and eventually gained insight to the various operations within the Food Bank. We were trying new fund-raising ideas, some with great success and some not. I offered "Hunger Knows No Season" which became an active touch point for several years. Given Phoenix's record growth, changes at the Food Bank became the norm as the organization worked hard and smart to meet the growing needs of the community.



In the late '90s I was being groomed; I just did not fully understand. I had refused Board opportunities saying I could accomplish a more successful Food Bank agenda by not being on the Board. John van Hengel, the father of Food Banking was still active with local opinions and global influence. John reported to his office, his small (very small) complete with tattered clothes and his famous white shoes. I think the white shoes were a carryover from the '60s, Sandi Gold worked hard to restore the color, sometimes daily.

STORY NUMBER #1

Somewhere along the way, St. Mary's Food Bank dropped out of Second Harvest, as I was told to better serve those with local food insecurities (meaning more freedom). The US Government had officially asked John van Hengel to have St. Mary's Food Bank rejoin Second Harvest, a national food resource program representing 200 qualified food banks. Qualified food banks are required to meet numerous technical

health and food safety inspection criteria. John had previously started Second Harvest at the request of the Government. Eventually the Food Bank agreed to rejoin Second Harvest whose current name is Feeding America. But I clearly recall the first big issue. One of the many new regulations involved temperature, meaning food temperature, meaning maintaining food temperatures and recording food temperature at departure, in route and at arrival.





On a sunny afternoon I got the dreaded phone call asking what do we do? Seems a truck load of dairy products had been picked up and in route to the warehouse and the temperature dropped below an acceptable reading. Yes, it is true regulations call for complete disposal. Yes, it was a hot typical day in Phoenix. It was communicated to me the truck driver and warehouse crew could not bring themselves to dispose of the dairy products. The transport included the rare and coveted ice cream, a highly desired treat to the community we serve. Someone suggested we consider not recording the temperature while transporting and not dispose of the dairy products. Passion-driven thoughts; the right thing to do was not open Pandoras box and not have the Food Bank subject to emotional decisions by the very passionate, hardworking staff. I ultimately directed two action items - dispose of the dairy products; use a hose and it let drain to the back parking lot drywells. Yes, I know a potential EPA concern for engineers; probably not if enough dilution occurs and in addition, do not inform our founder John van Hengel, as John will not be happy. Within a few days I was at the Food Bank and John asked to see me. I was nervous. I walked into John's office and told him I knew he was not happy with my decision. I told him it was a very difficult decision but we needed to serve our Feeding America relationship in order to keep up with the growing demands of the people we service. That was it; talking was done. I left John's office. Later I learned he was not happy but understood. Just another day at the world's first food bank.



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STORY NUMBER #2



In the 2000s, the greater Phoenix area population was growing, as was the food insecurity of many. The Food Bank's main warehouse (a donation from the Dell E. Webb company in the 1970s) was at capacity. Meaning dry storage, freezer storage and racking were at capacity. In addition, parking was very limited for both employees and volunteers. The Food Bank was renting parking stalls at adjacent properties and using golf carts to transport employees. Time was being spent to continually reposition tractor trailers due to lack of maneuvering space and parking areas for the Food Bank's fleet. I recall the phone call; seems Food Bank drivers had temporarily parked a trailer, okay maybe 2, on the adjoining railroad tracks.

This occurred the same day Southern Pacific Railroad was running the rails with a train pulling cargo. The Food Bank had blocked the rails; no goods were being transported. Seems a train was being blocked. Southern Pacific Railroad representatives were upset, they told Food Bank workers that the Railroad was permanently blocking the access crossing their tracks from the Food Bank property. This travel route was the Food Bank's main exit with food-loaded trailers.



Photo: Jim Campbell

WOODPATEL still had contacts at Southern Pacific Railroad from our railroad design work in the '80s and '90s, when rail-served industrial lots and industrial subdivisions were desired. WOODPATEL's partner Jim Campbell was our railroad expert and still had contacts with Southern Pacific Railroad. Jim reached out and made contact. Then I called and pleaded, I mean begged for forgiveness. I held a meeting with staff and truck drivers to communicate the importance of keeping the tracks clear. The Food Bank was given a second chance. What a week at the world's first food bank.

ST. MARY'S STORIES

STORY NUMBER #3

Stress was everywhere concerning operations at the Food Bank. Food needs of the greater community were continually growing and challenging operations. The Food Bank was at its physical land and facility limits. Then something big happened; the property fronting Thomas Road on its north side and fronting the Food Bank on its south came up for sale. No kidding a potential solution but not without trial and tribulations, as I would learn.



The property consisted of 3 separate buildings (built at different times sharing common walls), 2 buildings were in distress. The property included a large undeveloped area, begging to be a parking lot. Food Bankers are very passionate and skilled at helping others, but as I would learn land acquisition is not a comfortable subject. Acquisition of this property would solve all of St. Mary's Food Bank's current and perhaps future challenges of expansion and new programs, I strongly believed.

Our parking and tractor trailer problems would be solved. So many advantages to acquiring this property but uncharted waters lie ahead. WOODPATEL's survey partner, Tom Gettings, led the responsibility of ALTA surveys for the potential acquisition and the existing parcel. No boundary issues or encumbrances were found. WOODPATEL's commercial department partner Darin Moore developed a site plan. The site plan was a powerful tool for the Food Bank, as visually it displayed the future of "what could be" at the Food Bank. Acquiring the adjoining property solved many problems but not operational shortage of space. Money solves many problems including problems of nonprofits; new conveyance systems, new racks for storing, increased freezer space, and additional trucks for increased routes.

The Food Bank had become comfortable fund raising for everyday operational goals, but a separate large scale bank loan was uncomfortable for many Board members. First things first, as the President of the SMFB Board I presented a worthy presentation (in my opinion) to purchase the adjoining property. I also noted the seller had interest from others but due to our nonprofit and mission, a sale favoring St. Mary's Food Bank was more desired. I advocated long and hard for agreeing to the purchase of the adjoining land parcel. The Food Bank Board had 10 members, as I recall. Three were bankers and a Catholic nun, Sister Michele. My learning curve was being challenged with real life situations. I learned I favor technical problems and solutions. Here's why: due to active loans with SMFB, the bankers believed it was a conflict of interest to vote for something that eventually would require a loan. These were my guys who understand money and the importance of moving forward with a land purchase to solve problems. Certainly Sister Michele would see the value. Sister Michele communicated that she never owned anything requiring a loan, and this request of a land-building purchase request was well beyond her comfort level.



The Board met and we voted, with the Bankers voting no-go, others followed. Paul Barnes was CEO and leading the Food Bank. He also was responsible for picking me up, dusting me off, and telling me “You got this”. Please note Paul was not technical but was very passionate, I was thinking we needed both to get through this ordeal. The next Board meeting was scheduled. the Board’s lack of desire to revisit a failed agenda item requiring land acquisition and funding quickly became my challenge and purpose in life. Perhaps my 10 years at the Food Bank could serve me with a solution. I needed something more than a problem; solution - reintroduction to guide a positive vote. I was crazy nervous to say the least, I opened with my lead line. We have been presented with an opportunity which we need to vote on again. Please take note that this adjoining property is for sale and others are interested. Also, most importantly “God is not making any more land”. What a nerve-racked evening. Board members revoted; the most knowledgeable abstained. Approval to proceed with acquiring the property was approved. What a night at the world’s first food bank!



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