



www.thefoodpantry.org

talking with our volunteers

As many as sixty people volunteer each week to run the food pantry at St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church in San Francisco. Most are people who came to get food and stayed to help out; some are neighbors, and some are first-time visitors. Every one of them has a story, and together they create a living, growing community. This issue's interview is with volunteer Andrew Siroka.

I'm 25 now; I grew up in Staten Island, in New York. Most of the kids in my neighborhood were Italian, and they'd invite me over to Sunday dinner at their houses. I think that's where I learned to love cooking. Nobody in my family really cooked, so I took it over, at a young age.

I went to a kind of cruddy high school: none of the kids ever left Staten Island. But I wanted to get out, and I got a pretty sizeable scholarship, so I went to college in Michigan to study statistics. As you can imagine, it was freezing! And I stood out—I was very much a New Yorker, talking fast and loud.

Michigan was my first experience being in a liberal, intellectual place. And I was new to outdoorsy things—I'd never gone on a hike or seen a cow. Then I got to study abroad one year, in Florence. I stayed on to go



Volunteer Andrew Siroka loves to cook for friends.

to a cooking school in Bologna, learned Italian and traveled all around. I had a friend who lived in Milan, so I could live the real Italian life, instead of the touristy Italian-Disneyworld thing. It was amazing.

I moved to San Francisco, and got into the food scene, but decided I didn't want to work in restaurants. It's low-paid, physically demanding work: you wind up with varicose veins and burns and injuries, for \$13 an hour. I'd rather chop onions on my own time. So I found work at the VA Hospital, running clinical trials. But I lived in Potrero Hill, and I'd see the line on Fridays at the food pantry. I went up to Eduardo, who works outside, and asked him what was going on.

In about five seconds Nirmala had me lifting watermelons and I was hooked. I'd volunteered before at the Food Bank—that was cool—and tutoring kids, but the vibe at The Food Pantry is just so friendly. I like how everyone pitches in, and the feeling of community. And as someone who works in public health, I love what we're giving out—it must be about 75% produce, and it's really fresh and good.

I've been a volunteer for about 18 months now. I work unloading, setting up, a bit of everything. By now I'm even willing to take on a bit of a leadership role, I don't

have to wait to be told what to do next. It's very cool to know the volunteers and the families who come to get food. And of course, I love cooking. I'm always the one in my group of friends who cooks. So at The Food Pantry, whenever I can, I try to help out with preparing the volunteers' lunch. I always duck my head in to see what's needed, even if it's only slicing strawberries for an hour, or plating food, or carrying it out to the tables.

I love San Francisco, and the people I've met here, and I'm excited about whatever comes next. Life is good.

behind the scenes

by Virginia Giblin

the Food Pantry has to run like a well-oiled machine to keep it running at all, and it takes a whole lot of hands to do the work. For example, just walk out to the back of St. Gregory's Church, and you'll find our volunteers Glen, LJ, Trina, Rudy and a variety of others breaking down an extraordinary volume of boxes and sorting them. Plain cardboard to the blue bins, waxed cardboard to the green bins, trash to the black bins, over and over all day long.

The team starts super-early in the morning: hauling pallets of food into the church and taking the empty pallets away; breaking down, stacking and stuffing cardboard into bins; sorting trash and compost; carrying stacks of crates of all shapes and sizes up and down our back alley to the shed; wheeling the heavy compost bins down to the basement; sweeping and sweeping up again.

A hidden expense of The Food Pantry is the cost of recycling—it costs us about \$75 every single week to get our waste picked up. We fill bin after bin with cardboard. And when the bins are full, about 20 cubic yards of extra cardboard must be stacked by somebody, and tied with twine by somebody, then stacked again in the giant metal dumpsters for the recycling truck to pick up.

Add to that the six big green bins we fill with not just waxed cardboard, but also compost, compost, compost. All those corn husks, dropped green beans, smushed tomatoes, broken melons and more go into green bins, again taken to the recycling center.

The Food Pantry is just one small part of San Francisco's Zero Waste Goal:



Volunteers breaking down boxes

the contents of our green bins get carted off to be composted, then reused to grow good food elsewhere in the Bay Area. It's great to know we're part of the cycle, with our funky foodstuffs.

If you can lend a hand with recycling, please come by any Friday—we especially need volunteers from 2-4PM. And if you can, please make a donation to help cover our costs: \$75 will pay for a week of recycling.

food, love, & accordion music



Clark Cole plays at The Food Pantry.



by Cortney Hamilton

The Food Pantry's new video is a surprising, funny, beautiful four-minute love song to the pantry and its volunteers, shot by documentary filmmakers Cortney Hamilton and Deb Tullmann

of Candlefoot Productions www.candlefoot.net. Watch the video on our website www.thefoodpantry.org

The most surprising thing about The Food Pantry is how efficient it is. We couldn't believe the sheer bulk of food that goes in and out of that place in a single day. People walk in with nothing and are out of there in five to ten minutes with huge sacks of groceries. Unbelievable.

This piece was really energizing for us to do. Typically, we'll do short films for companies and non-profits that entail

a lot of people talking in soundbites. Here, we were able to film the experience itself, and to capture the spirit and fun the volunteers have.

One of the volunteers, Clark Cole, often brings his accordion and plays at The Food Pantry: having his music as the soundtrack captured the joie de vivre of the place. We wish all our work could be as fun as this piece was.

seasonal eating

Thanks to the **San Francisco Food Bank** and its network of farmers, we give away literally tons of delicious fresh produce every single week at the food pantry. This summer, we've offered an abundance of local fresh fruit: peaches, nectarines, plums, cantaloupe, pears, strawberries, raspberries and blackberries. And we've been celebrating melon madness: for weeks we've been giving away bins and bins of enormous sweet watermelons, some the size of small toddlers!

As always, we have potatoes, carrots, and onions; recently we've given away sweet corn on the cob, green and red cabbage, green beans, Portobello mushrooms, radishes, cucumbers, zucchini, summer squash, yams, artichokes, scallions and beets. And don't forget the greens: romaine and butter lettuce, arugula, kale, Swiss chard, rainbow chard, turnip greens and endive.

Providing this kind of fresh, healthy food to hungry families means so much to us: it's wonderful to see a kid walking out eating a peach, or a mother's cart filled to overflowing with greens. We're grateful for the farmers who make this abundance possible, and to everyone at the Food Bank who sorts, packs and delivers those pallets every week.



Real food for hungry people

eat, share, give



during the summer we tend to get a lot of visitors at The Food Pantry, including groups of kids from schools and churches who want to volunteer and learn more about the pantry. We love having their energy, and put them to work unloading pallets, lugging crates of vegetables, breaking down boxes for recycling and serving families. In July, one group of visiting middle- and high-school students not only worked past the point when the adults were all collapsing with exhaustion, but gave us a gift of \$50 they'd raised. "Buy more food," they said.

"...a new record, serving 912 people one Friday..."

The Food Pantry isn't supported by the church or government agencies, but is funded by donations from people like those kids—and you. Right now your gifts mean more than ever.

We have seen **our numbers go up by over 20%** since the beginning of the year, and the lines stretch around blocks. In August, The Food Pantry hit a new record, **serving 912 people one Friday** at St. Gregory's. Many of them were newly unemployed, others were struggling to stay in their houses or apartments, and some families had lost their homes.

We are so proud of the way that our community has responded. We're an all-volunteer program, and as many as 60 visitors and long-time friends turn out, week after week, to help others. And we're grateful for the gifts and regular pledges that allow us to help families get enough to eat in these difficult times.

The Food Pantry still manages to be incredibly efficient: **it costs us just one dollar a week to buy groceries for a**

family. Fifty dollars will help feed a family for a year.

All donations are tax-deductible. Please

use the enclosed envelope to mail us your gift. Or you can donate online: thefoodpantry.org/giving. Make a pledge, if you can afford it, and ask your friends to contribute, too. Thank you.

about the pantry



The Food Pantry's mission is to increase hungry people's access to food. We run our flagship pantry at St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church in San Francisco, and offer training, small amounts of start-up money, and support to other pantries in the Bay Area (so far we've helped start 18!)

Every Friday we give away free groceries to all comers, as many as 900 hungry families. We set up farmers-market style, providing literally tons of fresh fruits and vegetables, rice, beans, pasta, cereal, bread and more. The pantry is run entirely by volunteers—almost all of them people who came to get food and stayed to help out. Everyone is welcome to receive, and to give.

If you are interested in starting a food pantry in the Bay Area, please contact director Sara Miles (sara@thefoodpantry.org.) If you want to volunteer with us, come any Friday between 9AM-4PM; we especially need volunteers between 2-4PM.

The Food Pantry
500 De Haro Street
San Francisco, CA 94107
www.thefoodpantry.org

DONATE

All contributions are tax-deductible; make checks to **The Food Pantry**, and send to: The Food Pantry, 500 De Haro Street, San Francisco CA 94107
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