

The Washington Post

30 cheers for the Food Bank

Monday, January 18, 2010; A16

MIXED EMOTIONS accompany the 30th anniversary of the founding of Washington's Capital Area Food Bank. There is, of course, gratitude to an organization that has done so much to make this community a better place to live. But also there is sadness that there are still -- more than ever -- hungry people in need of its services.

The [Capital Area Food Bank](#), the largest nonprofit hunger and nutrition education resource in the region, opened its doors on the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday, Jan. 15, in 1980. Brainchild of the Interfaith Conference and the United Planning Organization, it was born of a need to do something for the area's poor and hungry following massive cuts in the federal [food stamp program](#).

The food bank has grown from a small operation providing 1,539 pounds of food per month to a few thousand people to an organization of some 70 employees that distributes 25 million pounds of food a year to more than 383,000 people with the help of 700 nonprofit partner agencies in the District, Northern Virginia, and Maryland's Montgomery and Prince George's counties.

What makes its work all the more remarkable is that it receives no government support for its operating expenses (The Washington Post and The Washington Post Co. have long supported the food bank, including donating more than \$250,000 and helping to create the [Good Neighbor Corporate Campaign](#) and the "Til No One Is Hungry capital campaign.)

Distributing food donated by a network of suppliers is just one part of the food bank's comprehensive approach to addressing the issues of hunger. Led by Lynn Brantley, its president and chief executive, the group teaches the principles of better nutrition, engages in food stamp outreach, helps its partners become more effective and advocates on a host of issues dealing with hunger. Consider, for example, the group's unique collaboration with the [Chesapeake Bay Foundation](#) on a farm project that provides chemical-free produce to low-income residents who are taught gardening skills and food preparation.

It's in keeping with the group's mission of public service that it is using the occasion of its 30th birthday to call attention to the spike in needs caused by the current economic downturn. Calls to the group's emergency food hotline increased 91 percent in 2008 over the previous year, and partner agencies are reporting a 200 percent increase in demand.

People who never thought of themselves as wanting are now in need; that's why the work of the food bank is so critical.

