

Long Island Volunteer Hall of Fame

Archive Project - Inception to Induction

Island Harvest

Year of Founding: 1992

Issue(s) Addressed: Poverty, Homelessness, Nutrition

Induction Category and Year: Hunger, 2002

Founder: Linda Breitstone

Personal Quote: Linda Breitstone's nominator and (as of 2002) president of Island Harvest, Thomas Waring wrote, "Our founder successfully walked the path from conception to reality when she started rescuing food in 1992. The walk was a long and hard one, filled with difficult choices, balancing her life as a wife and mother, and convincing local government, business, and the community that rescued food was nutritious and it could be donated and delivered in a safe and efficient manner."

History: Witnessing the staff at the Rockville Centre 7-11 throwing away valuable food as poor people wandered the streets wearing signs that said "will work for food" inspired her to organize a means to transfer businesses' excess food to those who needed it most. Initially, she began by simply convincing the local 7-11 manager to allow her to collect the excess food and deliver it to a domestic violence shelter and nearby soup kitchen. While she recognized that this simple act made a difference for those local groups, combating hunger on Long Island required a larger coalition of businesses and activists dedicated to serving their community's needs. Eventually, her effort and dedication crystallized into Island Harvest.

Having formed her vision for Island Harvest, she acquired the necessary office space, funding, and cooperation with local chefs and businesses necessary for her vision to succeed. With this groundwork in place, she forged links with other community organizations and activists eager for the donated food. Although Island Harvest does not directly feed the poor, it links businesses eager to dispose of unwanted food to direct service providers desperate for food contributions. This methodology works because it gives businesses a more efficient and socially and ecologically responsible means to dispose of excess food, while at the same time, allowing charities to devote fewer resources to acquiring food and more to other programs.

In 2001 alone, Island Harvest rescued 3 million pounds of food from 500 food donors, with an estimated value of \$7 million, otherwise destined for already overflowing landfills and contributed it to 420 Long Island charities. Moreover, following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, it facilitated the delivery of over 300,000 pounds of rescue supplies and equipment to rescuers at the World Trade Center site.

Since Breitstone's 2002 induction, Island Harvest has expanded its coalition of businesses and individual donors to serve an even larger network of local charities and increased the total volume of donations by 2.5 times. Its number of contributors has grown to over 600 and it

currently serves close to 500 local charities. From its creation to the present, Island Harvest has delivered over 56 million tons of food and supplementing an estimated 44 million meals. Recently, Island Harvest has waged its campaign against hunger in, as what its website called, more “targeted and strategic ways.” This is most prominent in its Weekend Backpack Feeding Program, which offers over 35,000 packs of nutritious food to children eligible for free school breakfasts and lunches, who would otherwise not have this on the weekends.

In unfavorable economic times such as these, Island Harvest will continue to play an important role on Long Island. As Long Island families face hardships, they often must choose between purchasing food and other expenses. Island Harvest serves an important function because it provides a safety net to people who would otherwise lack nutritious food. As its current president, Randi Shubin Dresner explained, “There are so many people who rely on the food we rescue. People from all walks of life that find themselves in a crisis situation and seek help from one of the many agencies that we serve. You don’t necessarily think about it, but the people eating the food we provide could be a neighbor.”

Agency Mission: “Fighting Hunger and touching lives, Island Harvest — Long Island’s largest hunger relief organization — serves as the bridge between those who have surplus food and those who need it.”

Scope of Activities: Island Harvest’s volunteers and staff collect food from over 600 local businesses to distribute to a network of close to 500 soup kitchens, food pantries, and other distribution agents. In addition to this, it also conducts programs that raise awareness for hunger issues on Long Island and educates the public on how they can contribute to helping others. For its efforts, it has received a four star rating, the highest possible, for four years running from Charity Navigator, the largest independent evaluator of charities in the United States.

Volunteer Involvement: Although Island Harvest has paid staff, volunteers play an important role in collecting and delivering food, as well as, persuading businesses to contribute to its mission. They also participate in seasonal food donation campaigns and raise awareness for hunger on Long Island.

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<http://www.islandharvest.org/intro.aspx>

Submitted by Colin Walfield, Summer 2010

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