

Food bank creates a culture of compassion

Heavenly Groceries provides more than just food to its patrons

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Heavenly Groceries is making a life-changing impact on the Carrboro community by providing quality produce and groceries to more than 5,000 people per month. Through this food bank, the ministry of St. Joseph Christian Methodist Church is creating a culture of compassion in the community.

The organization operates on a core belief that food nurtures the body and soul. Anyone who arrives at the doors is promised food—there are no restrictions or requirements. Visitors can come as frequently as they like, and the food bank is a consistent source of nourishment for most patrons.

Beyond Groceries

Berthe, a refugee from the Congo, comes to Heavenly Groceries every week with her children. While the food bank is there to serve her, the volunteers have been touched and inspired by her positive attitude and optimistic spirit. Berthe said that Heavenly Groceries has been a “tool of survival,” but the compassion and generosity of the Jackson Center, which works with St. Joseph CME Church to manage Heavenly Groceries, has also acted as a “safe haven” for her and her kids.

When Berthe came to the States, she had nothing. She explained that Heavenly Groceries enabled her to “build a life” for herself and her kids. “Without this, I don’t know how we would survive,” said Berthe. However, for Berthe and her children, Heavenly Groceries has been more than just a community food bank—“the compassion and generosity shown by these people has given us hope for a better life.”

George Barrett, who has been with Heavenly Groceries for a year and a half, said his most memorable day volunteering at Heavenly Groceries was when Berthe came in for food. He explained, “You never would have imagined the things she had been



The Jackson Center at 512 W. Rosemary Street acts as the headquarters for Heavenly Groceries, disturbing food to those in need and fostering community relationships (Staff photo by Mary Cox)

through, but she had the most warm and welcoming spirit and that greatly impacted me.”

Volunteers at Heavenly Groceries agree with Berthe that the food bank goes much further than simply distributing food. “It’s not about us serving food, it’s about the community coming together,” said Barrett.

Zach Kopkin, a worker at Heavenly Groceries, said that visitors are allowed to make their own food choices. Their goal is to preserve individual dignity and choice. Heavenly Groceries is one of the only North Carolina certified food banks that allows community members to select their own food, honoring individuals’ preferences and dignity during their visit. Kopkin explained, “This is a community food bank and functions as a real community.”

Heavenly Origins

Heavenly Groceries began in 2002 as a ministry of St. Joseph C.M.E. Church by the Rev. Troy Harrison and his wife Bernice Harrison. The couple saw a need for food in the community, so they began distributing bread from the Entenmann’s to members of the church. The couple’s actions grew into a fully operating food bank and safe haven to the Chapel Hill community.

The Harrison’s son Brentton has been

with the operation from the beginning and watched it grow over the years. He said that his parents “dreamed it would be big, but never thought it would be this big—they just wanted to make a difference in the community.”

Brentton Harrison working to connect Heavenly Groceries with garden resources so the food bank can continue to offer its visitors fresh produce.

Heavenly Groceries also delivers food to anywhere it is needed. They recently bought a new van using funds from an Oak Foundation Grant.

This could not have been better timing, Kopkin explained, because the day they bought the new van, the old one died on Rosemary Street. Kopkin said that having a new van “gives us hope for the future that we can continue filling that role [in the community] and think about how we can be part of larger collaborations to take care of neighbors near and far.”

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