

Food rescue program helps the hungry, reduces waste

Food: Recycling food eliminates waste factor

Restaurants, groceries donate food instead of discarding it

By **Brian Bushard**

bbushard@inkym.com **Gary Langley** sets the temperature of his refrigerated van to 34 degrees as he rolls in to Bartlett's Ocean View Farm. The back of the van is empty. But in just a matter of minutes, he will fill it with 12 crates of produce, drinks and cheeses. When he is finished loading the van, he'll bring it to the Nantucket Food Pantry.

The food weighs about 200 pounds.

"When we started, we didn't have a plan," said **Langley**, director of Nantucket Food Rescue, a nonprofit group of volunteers with vans who collect perishable food from island stores and restaurants for people in need. "I just thought the idea was good. People who handle food, they're in the business of selling food, they're not in the business of what can we do with this instead of throwing it out. Nobody wants to waste the food, but that's what they do."

He closes the back of the van. Two volunteers join him, a married couple who are both retired. They have their own pick-up truck with crates of Bartlett's food. The food in their truck is also heading to the Food Pantry.

"The idea is to get the food before it's thrown in the dumpster and give it to people in need," **Langley** said.

The group operates under the auspices of the Unitarian Universalist Church on Orange Street, where his wife, Linda Simmons, is the minister. It started four years ago.

Langley had not done any foodrescue work before then. His knowledge of the program came from reading about similar operations in other communities and statistics from the federal Department of Agriculture.

"I had done some reading about food rescue," he said. "In the United States, 40 percent of what is produced here goes to waste. Not only that, but all the labor and transportation and the carbon footprint that goes into getting it here. The tonnage is unbelievable when you think about it."

Four years in, the group has collected more than 40 tons of food, he said. There was no food rescue program on the island before his.

He parks the van outside the Food Pantry on Candle Street. All of the food he collects from Bartlett's FOOD,
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Gary Langley, of Food Rescue Nantucket, drops off a collection from Bartlett's Ocean View Farm to the Nantucket Food Pantry.

Photo by Brian Bushard

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goes to the Food Pantry. On other days he collects from stores and restaurants from Annye's Whole Foods to Stop & Shop, Moors End Farm to The Club Car, Lemon Press to The Bean to Espresso to Go to Something Natural to The Corner Table to The Green.

The doors to the Food Pantry are propped open. **Langley**, with help from volunteers Maureen and Vic Reed, offloads the crates inside. The crates contain Greek yogurt and mozzarella cheese, peppers and tomatoes, apple cider, milk, bananas and kale.

'It's produce and it's things that have just gone out of date: milk, juice, yogurt, eggs, dairy,' **Langley** said. 'All this stuff is perfectly good to eat. All of the sell-by dates are done by the manufacturer, it's not government regulation.'

By the state Good Samaritan statute, food that has passed its expiration date can be donated, as long as its quality has not significantly diminished.

Tuesday pickups at Bartlett's have become a weekly activity for the Reeds for the past two years. Maureen said she learned about the group from a friend over a game of paddle tennis.

'It's a cool thing to do,' she said. 'The idea that all this food is getting recycled and used, it's just the way I am anyway – I don't throw out food. I think that it's wonderful that it is not thrown away.'

Bartlett's average donation is 10 to 12 crates of food, produce manager Nick Delacruz said. The store simply can't sell it, he added.

"We do our best to sort everything, what's good to be utilized and what has to get thrown away, all the stuff that's terrible looking," he said.

“Seeing the things that get thrown away, stuff like fresh produce, that’s the hardest,” he said. “It has such a short shelf life it just can’t be sold.”

Langley’s next stop is The Club Car, which closed for the season two days earlier. At the end of the summer or fall, he said, several restaurants in town do not sell all of the food they have in stock, and call him for a pick-up.

On Tuesday, he collected dozens of tubs of relish, herbs, sliced bread, frozen fish, mashed butternut squash, eggs, sliced mushrooms and peppers. It all went in the van, to be distributed either to the Food Pantry or to other restaurants that could use it. If the food really can’t be used, he said, it goes to compost.

Two years ago, as more volunteers joined the group, **Langley** decided to step up deliveries. They then decided that along with delivering food to people in need, some of it could be used at places like the police and fire department.

Nantucket Food Rescue now delivers to the Landmark House, The Homestead and Academy Hill Apartments elder housing and the Steamship Authority. But 90 percent of the food, he said, still goes to the Food Pantry.

Without Food Rescue, he said, the organization would rely on deliveries of non-perishable goods, mostly in cans and sealed bags, as well as chicken and eggs from the Greater Boston Food Bank.

Food Rescue also picks up food after large events on the island, including the Nantucket Wine and Food Festival in May, he said.

'After the Wine and Food Festival, we picked up an entire cooler of little salmon patties with this Greek yogurt sauce on top,' he said. “There must have been 80 of them. They had made them and it didn’t go.’

The appetizers were dropped off at the police and fire department, he said. The Food Pantry can only accept food that is individually packaged. He delivers bulk foods to other locations around town.

The police officers and firefighters love the food, he said.

'It’s unbelievable,' he said. 'I mean, they’re always there, they’re working long hours. I’ll just come back a couple days later and pick up the pan.'

Some weeks, Food Rescue collects more food than the Food Pantry and other places can fit in their refrigerators, he said. On these occasions, **Langley** will bring the excess food to a portable refrigerated trailer parked at the Sustainable Nantucket farm plots on Hummock Pond Road.

The trailer came from an anonymous \$20,000 donation from one of the church’s congregants, he said.

“I can take the long-term stuff and put it in the freezer, and I can take the stuff we need out of the freezer and put it in the cooler,” he said.

The group started with only two members, he said. Now, it has 15 volunteers driving their personal vehicles to restaurants in town, bringing excess food to people who need it.

There's room for expansion, **Langley** said.

'There’s so much more that we could do,' he said. “For example, we’re starting to glean food from farms, like Moors End Farm. Sometimes, they have extra food if there’s a big harvest. We can do that with Sustainable Nantucket’s farms, too.”

Two years ago, he started a pilot program for a six-bythree- by-three-foot plastic food collection bin in Wauwinet. The idea was to collect food that people on vacation do not eat.

He picked up seven or eight paper bags of food every week.

“It was very successful that year so we went out to Madaket the next year and did the same thing,” he said.

“People on Nantucket live in a little bubble,” he said. “It’s like this is a vacation land. People think there are no problems here. I’d like people to be aware that there is food insecurity on Nantucket. People don’t like to recognize that.”

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– ***Gary Langley Nantucket Food Rescue***