

Pantries

Bread: A Particular Commodity

As Care & Share entered its thirty-sixth year, an AI Google summary said: *“Bread inspires quotes about sustenance, community, spirituality, and simple joys—highlighting its fundamental role in life and culture.”* Bread had intrinsically leavened the soul of Care & Share and lightened the hearts of its clients since its earliest years. It had been donated by vendors (esp. Stop & Shop pre-2012) and driven in back seats and trunks and pick-ups to be delivered daily to homes of neighbors-in-need by brigades of Care & Share volunteers, singly or as an ad hoc group. In the earliest years, bread often never got to the confines of sundry pantries, brought as it was straight from donors to recipients or to home-based re-packers, like in Betty Purvis’ garage, and then to recipient-clients. Bread has remained a mainstay, symbolically and essentially, of Care & Share’s mission to the citizens of East Lyme and Salem.

At inception, the first physical “home” for the Pantry was at the former “sail loft,” owned by C&S Co-Founder Gail Lundin, and located where three dozen years later, neighbors currently drive by Niantic Awning. The Pantry gave a visual to the vision and was a testament to the Founders’ persistence and community organizations’ acceptance and assistance.

Working from that location as a base added to volunteers’ homes, the first Pantry locale was a collection-and-jumping-off point, from which clients were served, but to which clients generally did not at first arrive for food assistance. The inaugural Pantry distribution was food to 8 families in November 1989.

In the subsequent early years, most assistance and projects were focused around holiday seasons, particularly Thanksgiving and when clients observed religious celebrations in December and Springtime.

Care & Share records and meeting minutes draw a portrait of a very nomadic adventure for the early years of the Pantry. The business world acumen of the Founders, and their contacts with others in East Lyme, was a catalyst for Care & Share volunteers tasked with finding a home for the wandering Pantry.

The journey was far from romantic or easy. The grit and determination and long hours of envisioning, planning, seeking out spaces, and beseeching owner-citizens, organizations, and town leaders to provide the itinerant Pantry a home all offer a testimony to the dedication, ingenuity, and persistence of Care & Share leaders and volunteers. Some spaces were just for a short time, while others lasted more than a year. Not all had heat, some just with electricity and water. Most needed muscle and volunteer hours to clean, paint, organize shelving, and stock with supplies in an orderly fashion to be shared by these undaunted “neighbors helping neighbors” — initially seasonally and eventually on a year-round basis.

Press clippings in the Care & Share scrapbook and meeting minutes tell the story of these seasonal Pantry servicing centers. It’s fun to travel around town and see their locations and what’s become of them today, though some of the buildings have made their way into the distance of past memory, as have all too many of our volunteers and clients.

Some of the following served as crucial Pantry holiday bases for food donation and distribution, clothing and gift donation and dissemination. See if you recall or can find these addresses and locale designations:

- 166 Boston Post Road (cited as “the old church”) Flanders
- 193 Pennsylvania Ave. (referenced as the “sail loft” or “sail shed”)
- Storefront in Midway Plaza – Flanders Rd – Route 161
- Granville Morris Building – Grand Street – by Fire Station
- The “Old Firehouse” on Grand.
- Lillie B Haynes School – Society Road (had to vacate by June 2004)
- The “white trailer” on Roxbury Road by Public Works.
- 11 Hope Street – (often referenced as the Cone’s building)

In 2004, a concentrated campaign of a C&S member-committee approached State legislative members, East Lyme Board of Selectmen, building owners, and organizations such as the VFW and Fire Department for a dedicated Pantry space in local/state buildings (Roxbury Prison bldg). Publicity fliers, letters to the media, and public informational meetings were leveraged too.

Meanwhile, before and after that date, all the above locations were made available by local merchants and families (e.g., Morris, Cone, Mitchell, Wilson) and town councils willing to support Care & Share in its mission to provide food, clothing, and some financial assistance to qualifying citizens in East Lyme, Niantic, Flanders, and Salem.

From Hope Street the Pantry moved for part of a year to Midway Plaza and then to its current Town-provided space at 12 Roxbury Road in late 2012. But the eight-year-long slog of a backstory, leading up to debuting the Roxbury Road pantry, is fascinating and worthy of recognition and celebration, as is the all-volunteer corps of C&S townspeople who kept the peripatetic pantries going while their pantry mates kept searching, beseeching, and imagining a permanent home.

Upon the June 2004 exit from the storage area in the Lillie B Haynes School, some space was made available for food storage at the bus driver's building on Roxbury and at the adjacent (white trailer) Parks & Rec space. Town leaders continued their support, even though it did not materialize in a constantly dedicated space for Care & Share right away.

It's interesting to recognize the versatility of C&S volunteers in that first decade of the 21st century. Back at that time, in 2004, bread and pastries were delivered daily to families, organizations, and seniors. The number of persons served and the cohort of drivers of personal vehicles was truly astounding. Day old bread supplies were donated by merchants while they were still viable to distribute to neighbors in need, rain or shine or other vicissitudes of New England weather. Though the pantry existed on Grand Street, much of the bread was picked up at Starbucks or Stop & Shop and delivered directly to recipients or committee leaders' homes for repacking, with no space or time occupied at Grand Street. Kay Martin went to clients' homes to check on them and to see what else they might need that Care & Share could address.

By November 2004 the Pantry relocated from Grand Street to 11 Hope Street, while the Holiday Store space was provided two long blocks away at 55 Pennsylvania Avenue. Care & Share applied for a Community Foundation application for \$ 11,000 in order to acquire a pantry freezer and refrigerator for that Hope Street location.

Celebratory moments were always appreciated, and each provided volunteers with revived energy for the tasks and signaled to clients that Care & Share was in its mission for the long term, as much as it could dictate its fate. By June 2005, the new Freezer was installed at Hope Street. A Pantry-warming Party was held on June 4. And putting the new appliance to its sole purpose, C&S sponsored a successful “Fill-the-Freezer” event for the general public to bring frozen food on East Lyme Day, July 16.

A sign of C&S and the pantry approaching a new level of maturity with its Hope Street location was the acquisition of liability insurances for the organization, but that did not cover its members as they provided services on site and driving deliveries to clients.

In 2006, the trajectory of food-sharing continued on an upward daily or weekly basis, and not as a seasonal event like at Care and Share’s inception. Over 15,000 pounds of food came into the Pantry as donations and purchases with fundraised money, and went out of the Pantry to regular qualified East Lyme and Salem residential clients and those with emergency needs. Some came to 11 Hope Street to pick up food and others received home delivery.

Entering 2007, the Hope Street “street/curb appeal” was being curated by a volunteering landscaper. Plans were laid for a January 13 interior reorganization, including new shelving. In a microcosm of the growth and neighbors’ reliance on Care & Share, the distribution of donated bread from Stop & Shop required review and reconsideration, eventually questioning a way to morph home delivery to over 70 families weekly, to a client pick-up system at the pantry.

By that Spring, Care & Share found it necessary to form a Feasibility Committee, whose task was to study whether C&S could/should construct a building for its use. The Board began to study how to launch a capital campaign. Muffin Man Andy Resnisky was looking into grant writing. This was because the Town had purchased the current Pantry site and would probably consider its own use of the structure and space for the future. What had been a significant advantage and centralized location in the major parking lot of the downtown area, the Pantry now sat in the midst of a downtown expansion that included plans for structure demolition and enlarged parking lot

construction. Neither of those bode well for the Pantry to remain at 11 Hope Street.

Pressure continued internally as well. As May 2007 dawned, things became very urgent at the Pantry, as a result of a doubling year-to-date of the persons helped and spring basket recipients. Supplies were low, shelves were empty, donations were down. A community-wide effort was instigated to leverage as many relationships as possible to sponsor food drives, fundraising events, and donations, including schools, churches, businesses, civic organizations, supportive individuals, and media outlets.

As fortunes and blessings would have it, by June the pantry was well stocked again to meet clients' needs. Many donations of materials and funds were responsible for the turnaround from a month before. Distinguished in a C&S meeting minutes "call-out" was a door-to-door food drive by Girl Scouts and another by Creative Playschool.

In the fall of 2007, C&S spoke at the Town Selectmen's meeting about needing a location for the Holiday Store and to reiterate the appeal for a permanent home for the Pantry and C&S operations. C&S also considered submitting a request that the organization be formally placed on the Town of East Lyme's 5 Year Plan for a permanent building and location. Both C&S and the Town of East Lyme were growing. Led by the ever-persistent Mae Hills and ably assisted by Tom Nebell, Care & Share's committee was determined not to be ignored or left behind in the fray.

The Feasibility Committee was flexing its proficiency-and-professionalism muscles as it reported that it had completed an original PowerPoint presentation including Care & Share's history, current activities, and why a permanent building was becoming a necessity. It was successfully beta-tested with First Selectwoman Beth Hogan and made ready for the full Board as soon as its agenda would allow.

Care & Share continued its time-honored seasonal events of food baskets for clients at Thanksgiving and through the winter and Spring holidays, all the while expanding its food provision its clients had come to rely upon on a regular (weekly/monthly) basis, in addition to the daily bread deliveries. Seasonally there were non-food items as well, featuring cold weather clothing and gifts and clothing in the Holiday Store in December.

The Spring Baskets for 2008 were the most requested ever: 89 baskets serving 267 people (C&S 58, 31 donated by churches). IGA donated and discounted prices for hams. It was a time with mixed recognition; and the beginning of the housing bubble bursting.

Reflective discussions began afterwards to plan for the future, particularly lessening volunteer requirements and driving costs by having clients come to a central location (the Pantry) to pick up their baskets.

As the historically autumn 1989 initial Care & Share project fed 8 families, it was indicative of Care & Share's growth that the Spring basket seasonal program, twenty years in, was so successful that it forced a consideration of yet again another change in how C&S could best serve the growing mission of helping neighbors in need, in time for the 20th Thanksgiving later in the year.

For tight economic conditions in the region soon diminished the Pantry daily stock on shelves. Plans continued ahead for what had become traditional and expected summer activities—Picnic Baskets, Scholarships, camperships, East Lyme Day Diamond Dig, and on-going emergency assistance. Emergency assistance was responding to about 10% more requestors than the year before and help with fuel oil, propane, car insurance, and gasoline were noteworthy. Publicity was increased, including an overture to the new East Lyme section of the Hartford *Courant*.

In the beginning of autumn in 2008, food drives by organizations and schools were again promising to source new supplies for the Pantry. In that season the Town installed new motion-sensitive outdoor lighting in front and behind the Pantry.

Pantry leaders Jim and Carol Indorato recognized the prudence of servicing and organizing the Pantry to be more efficiently ready for the increase in clients. They anticipated the coming holiday season and that also received planning attention in late summer 2009. Fourteen additional volunteers they sought came forward and provided the Pantry with a constant, strategically staffed pair of workers—each on a systematically rotating schedule of several hours bi-weekly. The Indoratos instituted a pattern that would provide a foundation for many years, keeping the C&S Pantry operating proactively on a daily/weekly basis, without wearing out a smaller cohort of members—all the

while maintaining a knowledgeable, experienced base for continued leadership in subsequent seasons. As it was doing with the twice-a-week Saturday intake hours, in real time, amid the press of post-recession needs, Care & Share was learning month-to-month what it meant to become a 21-year-old helping others, in this and other programs.

For, in that same 2008 recessional time frame, frozen meat was increasingly expensive, and supplies were circulating out to clients more speedily. A specially earmarked donation was sought to keep the freezer full and ready to serve client families.

And, as well, the bread delivery program was looking to be more serviceable, as clients were urged to be responsible about being home at their scheduled delivery time. Missed appointments and suspended deliveries were an unnecessary strain upon the time and resources of C&S volunteers, with spoiled or unused bakery goods a reminder of the necessity of planning and organization.

Emergency assistance new client counts for 2008 were up to 48 families, as July saw 29 food deliveries and 5 families assisted with fuel and electrical utility bills. (See “Statistics” chapter for fuller Emergency Assistance data). That growth continued through to the end of 2008.

Historians Mae Hills, Angie McLean, and Sally Bender were energized to reminiscence about the Spring baskets campaign of 2009. This was the first springtime event where clients came to a pantry location to pick up their baskets. They remembered that 45 families came on the appointed day. They lined up outside and came into the Pantry at 11 Hope Street in an orderly fashion. As they progressed through the pantry, each client received a basket/carton into which the organized Care & Share volunteers placed food items they picked from the pre-arranged cans, boxes, and packages and then the centerpiece of a seasonal ham topped off the menu items to send home. Angie McLean was so thrilled basking in that memory of the first time C&S had an actual budget to purchase hams, to augment the donated ones. Every family went home with a ham.

Sally Bender recalled the Care & Share experience of successions of coordinators exemplifying the way the baskets were to be done and training their successors. She delineated the succession saying that Sally Frechette-

York organized the baskets before the pantry coordinators Jim and Carol Indorato trained she, Sally Bender, and Jeanne Bonin. They in turn trained Tom and Tracey Mirsky to organize and coordinate the Christmas baskets thereafter. It was the historical cycle of Care & Share, one set of volunteers easing another into managing a major activity, assuring continuity while encouraging diversity—past experience begetting future creativity.

As Fall 2009 set in, several groups made donations of funds and food that restocked what had become a very depleted pantry, including Christ Lutheran Church, St Agnes Life Teen Group, and Stop & Shop. August and September distributions had also emptied out the freezer. Food donation bins were placed out for holiday collection at 15 businesses around town.

Care & Share's signature 2009 Thanksgiving basket project provided 135 baskets, with 71 of those being sponsored and provided by community businesses, churches, and individuals, which fed approximately 428 persons for the holiday. General Meeting minutes noted a donation of 12 turkeys by the Roesslers and, appearing with a mention for the first time, "a group of gentlemen called 'The Muffin Men' who donated 25 turkeys."

Seemingly right on its heels were the Holiday baskets, a traditionally joint project with the Lions. Pantry Coordinator Jim Indorato put out the call for Lion and Care & Share volunteers to assist, as soon as the Holiday Store finished its season on December 12, relocating over 3,000 food items from the Pantry at 11 Hope Street across the parking lot to 27 Hope Street, where baskets would be assembled and from which they would be delivered. That holiday 162 families with over 500 persons were provided with food. As well, many received some of the more than 1,000 gifts that passed through the Holiday Store that year.

An anecdote from Pantry Manager Jim Indorato was both charming and startling. In an effort that caused some identity confusion early on, CT State Employees used the name—Care and Share Program—for their statewide Thanksgiving and Christmas food drive for the needy. That program was not affiliated with, nor did it benefit C&S of EL. Statewide it distributed 4.7 tons of food. The C&S of EL total for that 2009 November/December season, including the huge contribution of food and physical help and support of the Lions Club and a "multitude of volunteers," in Jim's words, also gave away 4.7 tons of food.

With awe and pride, Jim finished his report by proclaiming, “We tied with the State!”

The following Spring Basket drive accumulated and distributed 2,175 pounds of food, over and above the weight of all the main course meats, chickens, hams, and turkeys. 175 adults and 111 children enjoyed the provisions in 81 C&S baskets as well as those provided by Flanders Baptist Church (13), St. Agnes and Vincent de Paul (14) and St. Matthias, for one large last-minute-added family.

The ongoing life and times of East Lyme are sometimes reflected in the C&S monthly meeting minutes. A sample from the May 2010 meeting was this Pantry report: “Jim Indorato also said that a couple of weeks ago he redeemed \$ 65.00 worth of Niantic Market food cards [for stocking the Pantry]. Thankfully so, as the store has now gone out of business!”

At the August meeting, Jim and Carol Indorato announced their retirement as Pantry Coordinators, effective after many years, at the end of the 2010 season.

Day-old bread remained a staple for the Bread Program, collecting from Starbucks and Stop & Shop, the latter of which had increased their donation as they stopped selling day-old bread in their store, setting it all aside for C&S. C&S volunteers delivered bread directly to homes and brought the excess to food kitchens and pantries in New London for immediate use.

75 packed and delivered 2010 Thanksgiving baskets were graced with overwhelming generosity from the community during their November preparation. All the public schools donated food items. Turkeys were donated by American Legion Post 128, East Lyme’s Firemen’s Union, the Muffin Men, Birk Corporation, Scott’s Yankee Farmer, and many unaffiliated citizen donors brought in a turkey or two.

A month later, with the Indispensable help of the Lions, 4,000 Holiday Basket food items and more than 105 frozen turkeys and chickens were transferred from the Pantry on Hope Street to the vacated Holiday Store on Pennsylvania Avenue, in about one hour’s time. In another two hours, all 105 baskets were assembled and packaged and ready for the very grateful expectant clients. Speed, coordinated effort, experience and unselfish volunteerism proved indispensable in neighbors-helping-neighbors once again.

In the following Spring (2011), baskets were again assembled and distributed, despite the Town-mandated impending May 31 relocation of the Pantry. There were 125 baskets that distributed over 3,000 pounds of food apart from the turkeys, chickens, and hams. Grocery store gift cards were included, proportional to family size. The Pantry distribution consisted of 35 families served by local churches and 90 families served by Care & Share.

George and Terry Mitchell generously offered space in the former Colonial Market as a “holding pattern” after June 1, until a permanent Pantry site was acquired. Nevertheless, considering all the uncertainty of acquisition and preparation dates for a space in the vacant Town Garage, the Care & Share Pantry relocated for June 1 in a storefront space in the Midway Plaza, further up Pennsylvania Avenue towards Flanders. Since it availed an increased amount of space and was expected to be a temporary home, no shelving was installed. Tables worked out just well for placing stock underneath the tabletop materials arranged for picking and packing. Things were reported running smoothly almost from the start, after a massive effort to transfer inventory and move two freezers. Even the bread program was doing well, receiving and disbursing almost two shopping carts of bread every day from Stop & Shop.

C&S volunteer-made home deliveries still predominated the manner of Care & Share food provision of Emergency Assistance and most regular Pantry client once-a-month food distribution after the relocation in summer 2011 to Midway Plaza. The ever-increasing number of emergency request food deliveries was taxing the available supply of driving volunteers.

Evaluating the summer of 2011 suggested challenges. August was replete with generous food drives, including Saunder’s Point Association (250 items), Stop & Shop’s steady flow derived from its promotion of patrons to buy a \$5 or \$10 bag of food for the Pantry, among others. Yet President Jim Hall explained that the increase in food deliveries out to clients and for emergencies was fast depleting the Midway Plaza supplies. Storm Irene did not cut power to the Midway Plaza, but many clients lost power and were then anticipated to be seeking replacements for spoiled food, straining supply levels even more.

A sad human interest note sounded that Thanksgiving of 2011. Long-time supporter of the Thanksgiving event and other C&S activities, Andy Resnisky, passed away in May of 2011. He was one of the community's extremely civic-minded individuals and one of the original members of the "Muffin Men," who met once weekly for civic, spiritual, and social activities. His obituary singled out Care & Share and Feed the Children, in lieu of flowers, for memorial contributions. Proceeds from his family-organized golf tournament were donated to purchase turkeys he was no longer able to buy and deliver in person.

As the Thanksgiving and December holidays approached, the Midway Plaza location seemed up to the task. East Lyme Firefighters donated about 20 turkeys, the Chapman Woods community collected Thanksgiving food items and assisted in assembling baskets at the C&S Pantry. Food Drives just before and after Thanksgiving were scheduled to fill baskets or restock the Pantry immediately afterwards and were held by Schools, Scouts, the Honor Society, Helping Hands of Spinnaker Community, and Salem Congregational Church.

The December C&S General Members meeting notes reflect that everyone of 150 families who sought a Thanksgiving Basket in 2011 received one. 90 were packed by C&S at the Pantry and 60 were sponsored by other individuals, organizations, or churches again that year and were distributed through the agency of the C&S Pantry. A few more than that same number or persons requested a Holiday Basket and/or gifts from the Holiday Store that 2011 season.

While still at Midway Plaza, under new President Angie McLean, elected in January 2012, some changes were begun that would carry over to Roxbury Road, when that time came. Most involved morphing from home deliveries to Pantry pickups by clients.

And so began the landmark transition year of 2012.

These realities were reflected in remarks made some five years later by C&S Board Member, Kevin Booth, on the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of Care & Share of East Lyme:

Kevin Booth, current board member, gave a brief history of the growth of the organization and the many locations from which Care and Share has operated over the years.

“Volunteers have persevered under difficult conditions having worked from back rooms of local businesses, an old trailer, and temporary housing in empty buildings necessitating frequent moves. The current location on Roxbury Road in an unused portion of the town garage gives the organization the space it needs to house an extensive pantry and a coat distribution area. Here members can assemble food baskets for Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Spring and wrap donated Christmas presents for children and small gifts for adults.”