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A solution to hunger in the San Gabriel Valley?



Sharing a hot cooked lunch at The Giving Bank. | Photo by Marlene Moore.

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October 3, 2014 [Nasrin Aboulhossn](#) Staff

Linda Hess packed her Prius one day in 2009 with hundreds of pounds of food from Trader Joe's in South Pasadena. With her car filled with fruits and vegetables — and baguettes of bread sticking out of the window — she drove from the grocery store on Mission Street to the AIDS Service Center on Fair Oaks Avenue to drop the food off to be distributed. So began [Urban Harvester](#), a food recovery program that Hess believes is the solution to hunger.

An estimated 14.5 percent of households in the United States lacked enough food to lead a healthy lifestyle in 2012, according to a [U.S. Department of Agriculture report](#). In the same year, more than 36 million tons of food waste was generated in U.S. landfills and incinerators — more than any other single material in municipal solid waste, according to the [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency](#). Urban Harvester aims to change that.

We spoke to Hess about the San Gabriel Valley-based organization, which connects grocery stores, cafes, restaurants, and other businesses with extra food to nonprofit agencies that serve free food to the public.

What is Urban Harvester?

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Alhambra mayor launches outreach booth to connect with residents

[Kyle Garcia](#)

Alhambra Mayor Gary Yamauchi will host a booth every first Sunday of the month at the Farmer's Market.



QUESTION 7: Which one of these people is not on Alhambra City Council?

Alhambra 101: How much do you know about your local government?



Alhambra police asks for community input about department via survey

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NEWS ROUNDUP: West San Gabriel Valley news from Alhambra, San Gabriel, San Marino, Rosemead, Monterey Park, South Pasadena, and Pasadena.



Man sentenced to 12 years for sexual abuse of Alhambra girl; South Pasadena plastic bag ban goes into effect Monday

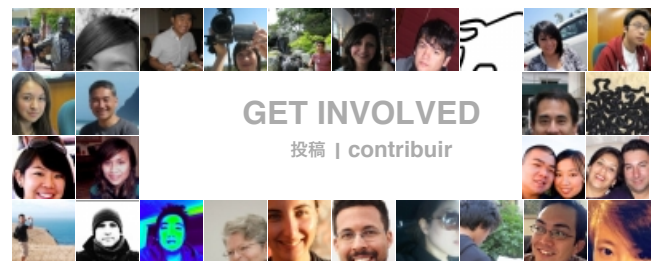
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COMMUNITY EVENTS

Social Media Safety Workshop

Oct 08, 2014 6:30 PM - 8:30 PM

There are lots of very quiet, struggling individuals and families. What I want to do is help communities identify the agencies serving them and connect them to resources of food. It's sort of like match making, a food dating service. And then once the match is good, we step back.



Linda Hess and Joel Shapiro, retired South Pasadena School Superintendent | Photo by Derek Dixon

And it's not just about getting food. A lot of the places I focus on are now being able to take their funding and put it toward more than food. If they're getting free food that's fresh and safe, now they can put their funding toward helping people with the other services they need.

Why focus on food-serving agencies?

I started doing this in 2009 with the Prius, and in a few months the food began to change. It started as fruit and vegetables, and then it became wild caught salmon, filet mignon, packaged salads, and amazing additional amounts of food.

I walked out once with two big shopping bags of prepackaged salads with less than 24 hours left on the sell-by date. I took the bags to the park and thought, "Oh, great, I'm going to share these two dozen salads!" and I distributed them to homeless people. And then I went to Union Station to drop off things that weren't going to expire that day. And they went, "No, you don't do that. You bring them here, people come here, they get fed, and they also get the care they need. If you don't do that, then they're not wanting to come in."

Now, there are people who feed people who live on the streets, and I think that's beautiful. But food access is often the thing that brings people in the door of an agency. And if the agency can identify what brought them to that place, then it gives them an opportunity to help someone, to change their lives for the better.

How do you facilitate the relationships between donors and agencies?

I go in and say, "What do you do with everything you don't sell at the end of the day?" If they say, "We share it with our staff," that's fantastic. But for the ones that don't, then you want to say, "Would you consider..do you know that down the block there's..."



Volunteers picking up food for the AIDS Service Center food pantry. | Photo by Linda Hess

We've pointed out to school districts and restaurants that didn't realize all the resources they had, and they say, "We could donate that?" Yeah! What if I told you that bagged or chopped onions would stop a volunteer at a soup kitchen from



Divorce Options Workshop
Oct 09, 2014 12:00 PM - 1:30 PM



Monterey Park Farmer's Market
Oct 10, 2014 4:00 PM - 8:00 PM



Pasadena Farmer's Market
Oct 11, 2014 8:30 AM - 12:30 PM

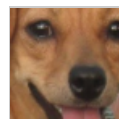
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Alhambra Police Department Citizen Survey

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October is National Adopt a Shelter Dog Month. Cats have demanded equal time! In honor of our shelter's founding in 1924 and our 90 years of...



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[Michael Dergar](#)

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We work with community organizations, teachers, pastors, nurses, construction workers, students, engineers, dancers and others to tell the stories of Alhambra.

spending two hours peeling and cutting.

How do businesses get involved?

They can go on the website and [fill out the intake](#). Then we talk about how often, what type of food, when they'd want to start, does it have an end point, is this an ongoing thing? There are so many questions that if you discuss those ahead of time, it just because an automatic process.

You recently encouraged the city of South Pasadena to approve a “food recovery” resolution. Tell me more about that.

I am so excited about that. I had to go in front of the Environmental Commission, and they asked fantastic questions. At the end they unanimously agreed to pass that on as a recommendation to City Council, City Council approved it, and it's our first city to pass a resolution that food will not be wasted.

It's just a resolution. It's not forcing anybody to do anything. But it sure is nice to have the city on board. Then I went to the Chamber of Commerce, and now they are going to reach out to the business community. So I see this as being something that we can roll out to every city.

You mention on your website that you'd like to take this global. How do you see that happening?

There is a gentleman in Kenya who reached out to me on Facebook and wanted to do food recovery, to get food from the city to the villages. I asked him to do the same footwork that I would do



Plates waiting for a hot meal at a nearby soup kitchen | Photo by Linda Hess

anywhere. Go ask the retailers, talk to the local government. Who's doing it? Who's feeding people? Would the city stand behind something like this and help you create this model? I believe he's working with the church that is going into the local town.

If we can go into each city and work with the city leaders and the community, we can identify a list of those who feed people and make that available for the donors in the community.

What is your vision for Urban Harvester?

We've partnered with LA211, which manages 49,000 non-emergency programs in L.A County through a call center. I asked them, of all the agencies who were feeding people, who needed more food. So a couple years and rounds of questions, the list was well over 400-600 agencies, such as soup kitchens, shelters, food pantries, and food banks.

Recommendations



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Evoke Dance Company Combines Dance and Charity for Los Angeles' Homeless Youth
4 people recommend this.

Alhambra police arrest man for allegedly cashing fraudulent checks
3 people recommend this.



Alhambra High School assistant principal resigns following sexual abuse allegations *Updated
14 people recommend this.

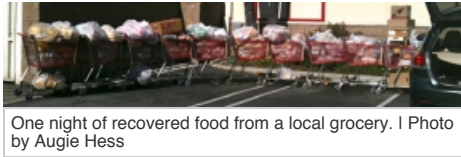
Healing through a lens: Alhambra filmmaker sheds light on photography program for veterans with PTSD
3 people recommend this.

More than 600 Alhambra residents without power
25 people recommend this.

Facebook social plugin

With that list and the hundreds of agencies that we are finding on our own, we're started a database. So if you are the food donor, you will someday — my hope, my vision —stand on the corner and say, "Oh my gosh, we just got a shipment," or it's the day after Thanksgiving — which was the case one time — and 200 kosher organic turkeys arrived a day late. So if donors had 10 places that matched their need, a database of the agencies, that donor can go in and find them.

Do you believe this is the solution to hunger?



One night of recovered food from a local grocery. | Photo by Augie Hess

Yes. There's enough food out there to feed people, and it's wasted. It's just about putting the pieces together. We're not asking the government to spend millions of dollars to design a program, we're asking for communities to step up and help each other. It can't be complicated for it to work. So it has to be simple and connect the dots.

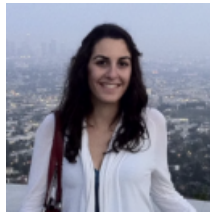
This interview was edited and condensed.

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