

Meet Linda Hess Founder of Urban Harvester

What do you do with your extra food at the end of the day? This South Pas Resident came up with the answer

By Alan Ehrlich

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“What do you do with your food at the end of the day?” is often the first question Urban Harvester founder and president Linda Hess asks supermarket managers, caterers and commissary operators.

In 2009, local resident Linda Hess, experienced an “a-ha” moment after attending a memorial service. Linda noticed the retired priest wrapping up leftover food and putting it onto a plate. The priest explained he was bringing food to seniors living at a Pasadena apartment complex and invited Linda along.

Hess was not prepared for what she saw. One resident at the apartment, just blocks from the Pasadena Senior Center, was living in total poverty. Several had little food in their apartments, one had few clothes to wear, no sheets or blankets, just a mattress on a frame on which to sleep.

She issued a 'humanitarian alert' to her friends and neighbors and collected clothes, sheets, casseroles and more. Linda realized this was a Band-Aid solution to a bigger problem.

Hess described what she had seen to an employee at Trader Joe's, where she shops, and how helpless she felt. Trader Joe's offered to give Linda the unsold fruits and vegetables to bring to the seniors.

Her "aha" moment was to wonder what other grocers, schools, restaurants and caterers do with all their extra food. Perhaps there was a way to connect all these sources of food with service providers such as senior centers, the Holy Family and St. James food banks, Union Station, ASC Pasadena, and Friends in Deed. Thus, Urban Harvester was born with Linda as the chief dot-connector.

"I figured out how to solve two different problems by turning them towards each other. Grocers, restaurants, caterers were paying to throw away perfectly good food while a few doors away people were going hungry and service providers did not have enough food to distribute. My mission is to suggest to food suppliers an alternative solution to dispose of fresh, unserved food."

Linda likes to share her views on current liability protection laws currently in place with companies to help convince store managers that the risk of her solution is low. Congress, in all 50 states, have passed Good Samaritan Food Acts limiting liability for donated food. Next, Linda needed to convince operations managers that setting aside food for donation would not add work or disrupt normal operations. Check, and check.

Thanks to donations from Trader Joe's, Fresco Community Market in Highland Park, Heirloom Bakery, Starbucks and others, in 2013 Urban Harvester recovered more than 43,200 pounds of food, equal to providing 35,000 meals.

For more information visit: www.urbanharvester.org

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