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Linda Hess, Founder of Urban Harvester, Woman of the Year

Selected by Congresswoman Judy Chu

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“What do you do with your food at the end of the day?”

South Pasadena resident Linda Hess often finds herself asking the question to supermarket managers, caterers, and commissary operators.

She’s an “urban harvester,” living in the City of Angels, an angel herself, of sorts, recognized for her big heart and generosity. It’s also the reason she was recently named one of Judy Chu’s 14 Congressional Women of the Year, receiving the prestigious award at the San Gabriel Masonic Temple.

After attending a memorial service followed by a home-style luncheon in 2009, something caught Linda’s eye – a retired priest wrapping up some leftover food on a plate.

The priest explained to her that he was bringing the leftovers to some seniors living at a Pasadena apartment complex and invited her to accompany him. The next thing she saw was something out of this world. Right in her own backyard, Hess saw one resident at the apartment, just blocks from the Pasadena Senior Center, living in total poverty. Several others had little food in their apartments, one had few clothes to wear, no sheets or blankets, and just a mattress on a frame to sleep on.

Hess immediately gathered her band of friends and neighbors and issued what she called a “humanitarian alert” and together, they collected clothes, sheets, and more. She expressed her concerns to what she had seen to an employee at a local Trader Joe’s where she shops and next thing you know, Trader Joe’s offered to give her the unsold fruits and vegetables they had so that she could bring them to the seniors. She then wondered to herself – what do other grocers, schools, restaurants, and caterers do with all of their extra food? She thought to herself that there has got to be a way to connect all these critical sources of food with local service providers to assist in feedings people who truly need the sustenance.

And so it begins. The Urban Harvester was born and Linda now finds herself seven years into her fight to recover food and eradicate food insecurities in our local communities. Since 2009, she has directed the donation of over 100,000 meals throughout the Los Angeles area.

Urban Harvester is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization that Linda founded, with a vision to connect food providers to agencies with a mission to help feed the people that are most vulnerable and hungry. Its Food Recovery Program annually connects over 25,000 meals from participating food donors to their already impressive and still growing network of local non-

profit community agencies all throughout Los Angeles County. Their sustainable efforts have prevented the needless discard of 20 tons of fresh healthy foods from the waste stream which reduces greenhouse gas emissions into our atmosphere!

In 2014, on World Food Day, Linda's tenacious efforts led to the approval and passing by the South Pasadena City Council for a Food Waste Prevention and Recovery Resolution, putting South Pasadena at the forefront at the initiative of fighting against hunger. And it doesn't stop there. Linda and Urban Harvester found themselves partnering up with Joint Venture Silicon Valley in 2015 for an initiative to look into the current efforts in addressing the growing hunger and poverty issues happening throughout the Silicon Valley.

They received a grant from Wells Fargo in support of their efforts and Linda and her team are working with graduate students from Santa Clara University's Frugal Innovation Lab to find ways to match and track food donations as an in-kind donation by building software. This scalable model will be applicable for use in any city, and currently, the prototype software is entering its first testing phase amongst the Urban Harvester advisors.

Sub-Headline : Selected by Congresswoman Judy Chu

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