

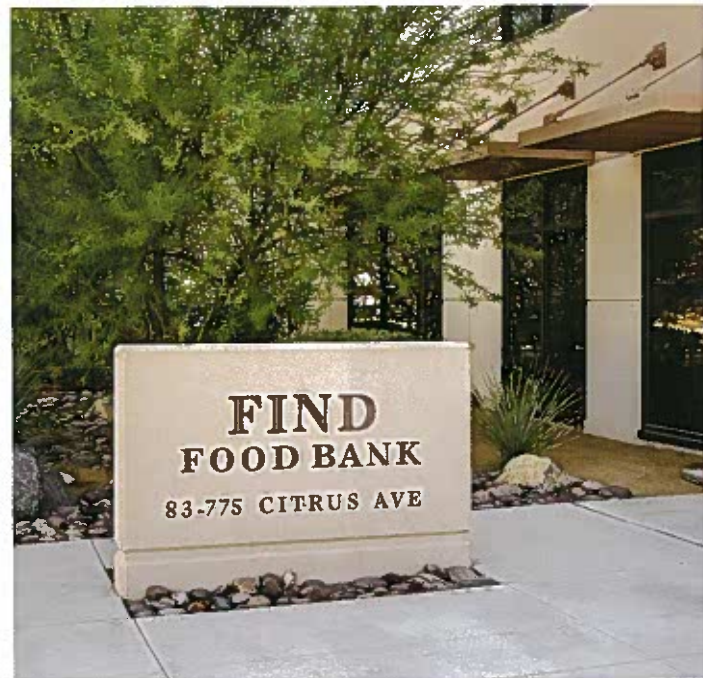
Food Insecurity?

STORY AND PHOTOS BY ANNA KELLY

Like many of us here in SCSH, I found I had extra time on my hands and began searching out ways to volunteer to help those in need. One of our residents, Sue Henricksen, invited a group of us to tour **FIND Food Bank**. Sue has volunteered there for the past seven years and heads up a group of SCSH residents that holds a yearly golf tournament to benefit FIND's work in the community.

Of the many things I learned on this tour, the concept of "food insecurity" made the greatest impression. This was a new phrase for me – not only the definition but also just how many people in our area experience food insecurity, including many senior citizens.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture says food insecurity means that a person's "consistent access to adequate food is *limited* by a lack of money and other resources at times during the year." On our tour of the food bank, we were introduced to Lisa Houston, CEO and President; Gwen Ford, past Board Chair and longtime volunteer; Deborah Hulsey, Office Administrator and Development Associate; and several others on the FIND team. They told us, "For one in six people in the Coachella Valley, food insecurity is a reality. Right now thousands of our area residents and neighbors struggle with hunger. These are often hard-working adults, school-aged children, and seniors who simply cannot make ends meet."



Left bottom: FIND building location. Photos above: FIND storage areas. Boxes of bread products. Gwendolyn Ford inspecting canned goods.

Ms. Ford noted that, even in our gated community, there are probably people who are going without meals, too proud to seek help or unsure of where to go. Existing research on the senior population reveals that individuals age 60 and older are experiencing heightened rates of food insecurity and are particularly vulnerable to the negative health and nutrition implications of food insecurity.

FIND stands for "Food In Need of Distribution," and it has served the Coachella Valley since 1983. It is the regional food bank for eastern Riverside County, from Whitewater to Blythe, and from Joshua Tree to the Salton Sea. FIND is the area hub for food distribution to more than 100 community-based partners in eastern Riverside and southern San Bernardino Counties; partners like Coachella Valley Rescue Mission, Martha's Village, and Galilee Center. FIND receives and distributes millions of pounds of food from farmers, corporate food manufacturers, and local food retailers. Donations to FIND reach an average of 90,000+ people each month across its service area.

After meeting the staff and listening to them describe what they do, we toured the warehouse where the food is received and stored. It is HUGE and very well organized. Everything that is brought in must be inspected and entered

into inventory. For fresh produce in crates, each piece must be inspected; sometimes, donations from food drives have to be sorted. Local drugstores or large warehouse stores contribute boxes of mixed goods that then need to be organized for later distribution. There are large refrigeration units for perishable items, and team members are constantly monitoring the temperature of newly arrived food sitting outside the refrigeration units before it goes into inventory.

Volunteers are always needed and welcomed at FIND. Of course, monetary donations are greatly appreciated as well, especially when you consider



Left to right: Debra Hulsey, Office Administrator and Development Associate; Lisa Houston, President/CEO; and Gwendolyn Ford, Board Chair Emerita.

that every \$1 donated equals 7 meals. There are volunteer positions for warehouse sorters, packers, and order processors. Plus, the front office can always use help with filing, folding newsletters, and preparing for visitors.

Another way to help, we were told, is to be educated about this issue and to keep "hunger" in the conversation. You never know when you may be helping a friend or neighbor who is too embarrassed to let you know they are skipping meals or choosing to pay utilities over eating healthy food.

What I took away from my tour of FIND Food Bank was more than just a definition of "what the heck is food insecurity?" I left with a better understanding of how this issue affects so many people over 60. I feel fortunate not to have experienced "food insecurity" but, in thinking more about it, I see that I've been finding ways to cut back on spending thinking that, in 10-20 years, I could easily find myself in that category. I no longer buy the most expensive vitamins, make-up, or clothing. My days of buying St. John knits are definitely in the past. We look for the best deals on happy hours, golf, and more.

Interestingly, my foray into searching out a volunteer opportunity opened my eyes to a whole new awareness of just how pervasive hunger is in our Valley and how it affects seniors in particular.

Visit FIND's website or Facebook page for more information on how to get involved:



www.FINDFoodBank.org

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Above: Stacks for product for distribution. Below: Gwendolyn Ford offers help.

