



# Sharing the Harvest

*1981–2001 • Edmonton's Food Bank • 20th Anniversary*

KATHRYN A. IVANY



## A Call to Action

While this is a book about our history, the work of Edmonton's Food Bank continues. Christmas and every day, Edmonton's Food Bank struggles to meet the need. The following are some of the many ways that you can help the Food Bank:



### **DONATE MONEY**

Edmonton's Food Bank is a registered charity. Monetary donations are essential for our operations and food purchases.



### **DONATE FOOD**

Look for our donation bins at City of Edmonton Fire Stations, major grocery stores and specific community events.



### **VOLUNTEER**

Volunteers are essential to our mission. A variety of volunteer opportunities exist including reception, hamper packing, driving and assisting individuals and families requesting food.



### **ORGANIZE OR HOST AN EVENT**

Events and fundraisers can include collecting food or money at your business, school or church. Functions can also include dinners and auctions. Please give us a call to find out more about helping to feed Edmonton's Food Bank.

Remember that hunger has an appetite and it won't be denied. It consumes self respect, swallows the spirit and feeds on indifference. You see hunger in a child's eyes. Hear it in a baby's cry. Feel it in a senior's hand. Food is our most fundamental need. Yet for some, eating three meals a day is a luxury. Changing that reality requires commitment—a commitment of ongoing, active concern. That is a recipe for a renewed society.

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# A History of Hunger

Poverty and hunger have been constants in human societies from the earliest eras of recorded history—and probably before. The City of Edmonton has a history of providing food and welfare “relief” from at least the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Many local churches assisted with food security as part of their “mission” to the native and newly arrived immigrant populations in the area.

Those efforts were seen as temporary solutions and as exceptional circumstances affecting a minority of individuals. In the 20-year period in which the Edmonton Gleaners Association has been operating, the perceptions of the poverty and food security issues facing Edmontonians have changed radically. Corresponding efforts to address those issues, therefore, have had to change as well.

The work of the Association began in 1980 from contacts made in the social services agencies, mostly working in Edmonton’s inner city neighbourhoods. Common problems were identified. Teachers needed lunch supplies to help kids concentrate enough to learn. The city’s shelters for the homeless, runaway, or thrown-away children and victims of domestic violence wondered how to feed the individuals and families who appeared at their doors. Clergy and social workers in churches and social agencies daily met families on welfare who couldn’t make their assistance cheques stretch to cover all the food costs in a month.

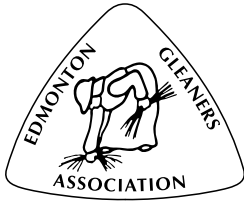
At the same time, in a society that was becoming aware of the vast amounts of waste created by our pro-consumer attitudes, the excesses of the food industry seemed to provide a possible solution—if a method could be developed to harness the potential. The idea of gleaning the surplus, or waste products, to feed those without the resources to feed themselves dates from biblical times and before. Farmers would allow their poor neighbours—who did not have land—to follow after the harvesters and pick up grains that had fallen to the ground.

In April of 1980, two individuals met at Sacred Heart Church to see what could be done in Edmonton to reconcile those two emerging trends. In June, they:

- invited 15 representatives of various agencies in Edmonton to brainstorm on the next step
- formed an ad hoc committee and
- decided to bring Bob McCarty, director of St. Mary’s Food Bank in Phoenix, Arizona, to Edmonton to advise them. Established in 1967, this was the first food bank in the United States.



**“THE GLEANERS”**  
BY JEAN-FRANCOIS  
MILLET



Next they formalized their organization, deciding on the name the Edmonton Gleaners Association instead of food bank for incorporation purposes, because of the connection that people might make with financial institutions.

In 1981, the Edmonton association was the first gleaning operation to be established in Canada. Before its second year was complete, members were receiving requests from cities and towns across the country for information on how to set up a gleaning program. By 1988,



**FOOD BANK VOLUNTEERS  
1983**

with nurturing from the Edmonton Gleaners Association, the Canadian Association of Food Banks, a national umbrella organization was formed and now provides administration to handle large corporate donations and a national distribution system.

The Edmonton Gleaners Association's original mandate was to salvage food products deemed "waste" by the local food industry and redistribute to member agencies that offered snack or meal programs. By 1983, however, as the public awareness of the Food Bank increased and the situation of many of the city's poorest citizens worsened, the Association found

itself on the front lines, providing emergency food hampers to individuals and families.

This change of organizational focus forced upon the agency quickly started a variety of internal and external studies. As the Board of Directors, their community partners, and their member agencies assessed the causes of the new demands on the Food Bank, they resolved to take a more public stance in defence of their clients' rights. While they were not alone in this stand, they were not always popular.

The issues of individuals' food security and the role that private versus government agencies should play in those issues grew into one of the most politically charged debates of the next decade. By the mid-1990s, both American and Canadian gleaning organizations were taking stronger advocacy roles on behalf of the people they help feed. Their efforts stretched to include education of the general public about poverty and food security issues as well as education of their clients about how to access the programs from which they were entitled to receive assistance and how to meet their nutritional needs more effectively.







# A History of the Edmonton Gleaners Association

After the initial organizational efforts in 1980, the Coordinating Committee was able to complete the paperwork (including creating the Bylaws and Constitution) required for incorporation of the Edmonton Gleaners Association by January 1981. The first Board of Directors was nominated, and held its first board meeting on January 26. They rented a warehouse on Fulton Road and secured a \$1,000 donation from Local Union 488 Plumbers and Pipefitters which, with other anonymous donations, allowed them to start operations.

By April, the Association had a membership of 14 organizations, most of which had snack and meal programs that could benefit from the gleaning activities. A more permanent space was required, so letters were sent to the federal government and local Members of Parliament as well as to local school boards asking for permanent storage space.

The Board sought charitable registration with the City of Edmonton so they would be able to solicit donations from the public. After receiving approval in October, the Fundraising Committee approached service clubs and foundations. The Communications Committee developed a brochure (the design and printing were offered free) to be used for public education and fund raising.

Bob McCord of CISN Radio suggested a "Radiothon" in 1982 as a first public fundraising event for the Food Bank. Its success soon meant that having a food "blitz" became a popular way for church

youth groups, service clubs, and community groups to help the Food Bank. Probably the most successful food drive in the first three years was "Tackle the Hunger," which collected a record number (45,000) of cans at an Edmonton Eskimos football game. The event created a high level of public awareness, received good media coverage, and was a great opportunity to provide intensive public education.

The Strathcona Food Bank was established and linked with the Edmonton Gleaners Association in the fall of 1982. By the end of 1983, the Gleaners Association had a total of 72 members. A full time Coordinator, Gerard Kennedy, was hired to supervise staff and volunteers and the Board of Directors was kept very busy gleaning food, making proposals to foundations and funding agencies, and ensuring the efficient operation of the warehouse and distribution systems.

The work of spreading the word about the Gleaners was helped in May, 1983 when ACCESS-TV aired a film on the Food Bank made with agency participation. An application to join the United Way was made in May. It was accepted in July with the first allocation of \$60,000 to begin in January, 1984. Another result of fundraising



**"THE GLEANERS"**  
BY ALEXANDER MANN



**TACKLE THE HUNGER  
FOOD DRIVE**

activity came in December, 1985 when the Wild Rose Foundation granted money for a new van to collect food donations.

After almost 3 years with the Edmonton Gleaners Association, Gerard Kennedy left the position of Coordinator in 1986 to take a similar position with the Toronto Daily Bread Food Bank. Brian Bechtel started in June as the new Executive Director. The Board also hired an Emergency Program Coordinator to assist with redesigning the Hamper Program in light of the record

demand. In August the Program was submitted to the United Way for funding.

The increasing demand for emergency hampers in 1986 affected the Gleaners Association's ability to carry out its original mandate of gleaning and redistributing surplus food products so seriously that the Board considered a resolution to cease accepting "walk-ins" at the central warehouse in January, 1987. A further complication arose in July when a tornado struck the city. Emergency food supplies projects were carried out in conjunction with the Emergency Relief Services Society and the Salvation Army. Late in the year, Marjorie Bencz, a former

volunteer, was hired as a temporary "Support Worker" to assist with the hamper program and in 1988 became the Hamper Program Coordinator.

The first "mail-out" campaign for Edmonton's Food Bank occurred in 1989 and by all measures was successful. The letters for support generated \$100,000 in financial aid and 96,000 kg of food. The Board of Directors also undertook some strategic planning for their future and helped to organize and raise funds for the Alberta Food Bank Conference to facilitate a regional network. Staff changes in 1989 included hiring a Fund Raising and Public Education Coordinator to support the new committee of the same name arising out of the strategic planning. Marjorie Bencz was promoted to the position of Executive Director after Brian Bechtel left to work with Canadian Mental Health Association.

The issue of the legitimacy of Food Banks was raised again in a year of "unprecedented questioning." The Edmonton Gleaners Association responded with the following powerful commitment: "Until such time as governments fulfill their responsibilities, it was agreed that food banks must continue to operate, to salvage waste, to feed the poor, to speak up clearly on behalf of clients and to uphold in both thought and operation a conception of the intrinsic value and dignity of those served."

As the Food Bank marked its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, the Edmonton Gleaners Association ambiguously took note of their accomplishments and the fact that the association was still required in the community. Its food and monetary donations were increasing and, with the new advocacy and supplemental hamper programs, emergency demand had slowed, giving the staff and volunteers a welcome break from the pressure. It gave the organization time to evaluate a new central screening project designed to assist member groups and churches that operated the remote depots. Accomplishments over the previous decade were noted with measures such as a 33 per cent larger hamper, with better nutritional balance, being provided. The cumulative total of food collected was calculated as 5,754 metric tonnes.

The 1990s, however, were not to continue quietly. Federal policies such as the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax directly affected the purchasing power of lower-income Canadians. Reform of the Unemployment Insurance program and reductions or restructuring of transfer payments affected many social programs at the provincial level. Social Assistance rates, which had been adjusted upwards in the late 1980s, were again subject to reductions by 1993. This time shelter rates were cut. The Food Bank recorded a 103 per cent increase in Food Bank hamper demand between November 1992 and 1993. Luckily, donations continued to exceed previous record levels.

By 1995 the benchmark of 100 member agencies had been reached. 60,000 hours of community volunteer services were donated in that year as well as record amounts of food. In light of the 122 per cent increase in demand from January 1995 to 1996, which showed no sign of abating, the Edmonton Gleaners Association did more strategic planning and produced a document entitled Directions 2000. Those goals included increasing food supplies, public awareness, and public support. They also vowed to continue advocating on behalf of their clients and on improving their access to services.

In real terms that translated into growing numbers of depots (30 by 1997) around the city capable of distributing hampers to 16,000 people each month. In 1999, the Food Bank was supplying 85 meal and snack programs as well as the hamper program.

*“...no person within Alberta will lack the goods and services essential to health and well-being...”*

*—Introductory quotation from the Social Development Act (section 2, page 3)*



**HERITAGE FESTIVAL  
FOOD DRIVE • 1987**

## Storing the Food



PRINCE OF WALES  
ARMOURIES • 1981-83

The first home of the Edmonton Gleaners Association was the Prince of Wales Armouries at 10440–108 Avenue. This served as the Food Bank's main warehouse from July 1, 1981 until 1985. Initially two rooms were rented for \$330 per month with the Association

responsible for the installation of a cold room and storage racks. In September 1981, the Board of Health issued a health certificate and Charitable Appeals Board gave permission to solicit food. Humans on Welfare sold an old van of theirs to the Gleaners (for \$1) and a further donation of \$10,000 from Local Union 488 in October really set the organization on its feet.

When the Prince of Wales Armouries had to be vacated, in 1985, the Board of Directors started the search for another facility. Many locations in the City's inventory and in private hands were investigated. The final decision was made in favour of the closed Safeway store at 9020 Jasper Avenue. Safeway remained the owner of the property and supported the Gleaners Association in terms of assisting with renovations and restocking of shelves as well as the generous \$10 a month rent. The lease was signed in November and renovations carried out over the winter, so that the move was made with little disruption of service in March, 1986.

The Safeway facility was highly suitable for Edmonton's Food Bank. It was easily accessible and visible. For almost three years the Food Bank flourished in their Jasper Avenue location. However, highly desirable property is eventually sold and in September, 1988, the Facilities Committee again went in search of suitable properties.

The next relocation occurred in November, 1989, when the Food Bank Central Warehouse moved to 10218–111 Street. The Facilities Committee obtained a short-term lease in a warehouse with good access for both delivery vehicles and those using the transit system. Canada Safeway, Gateway Refrigeration, and Anawim Place supported the Gleaners Association with the move. The building was smaller and less expensive and the volunteers and staff quickly adjusted to the new quarters.

In 1994, a sizeable legacy gift from the Rice family, who had been long-time supporters of Edmonton's Food Bank, allowed the Board of Directors to establish a building reserve fund. After the Facilities Committee had again searched the city and investigated 20 alternative locations, it recommended that the Board purchase the 111<sup>th</sup> Street property with a portion of the Rice Legacy. The landlord, Avenor Inc., also made a significant donation to assist with the purchase. The remaining Rice Legacy will ensure that future building maintenance needs are met.

## Reclaiming Surplus Food

The first efforts to identify sources of reclaimable food began early in 1981. Suppliers to retailers and wholesalers were approached to request anything that was unmarketable, although still edible. Several of the large suppliers in the city including farmers and market gardeners were receptive. In the first years of Food Bank operations the statistics reflected that 75 per cent of food came from gleaned sources, that is from surplus perishable food donated by the food industry. Eighty-five per cent of that food was distributed to food programs and 15 per cent to the hamper program.

A perennial problem for the food reclamation project was the reliability and capacity of the van used for pick-ups. In September of 1984 a larger van was purchased. The Wild Rose Foundation in 1985 provided funds for a new van.

By 1986, the Food Bank still reported that close to 70 per cent of the food donated came through their reclamation efforts. The big change, however, was that, instead of going to agencies' meal and snack programs, almost 70 per cent of the food donated was redistributed in the form of emergency hampers.

In 1988, the Board of Directors of the Edmonton Gleaners Association faced a new concern when they found food reclamation efforts were netting about 6.6 per cent less food than in previous years. The Board devised a strategy to identify and approach new suppliers within the food industry, and with the assistance of the

Muttart Foundation in 1989 began to increase gleaning efforts. By 1990, their efforts paid off. The fall 1989-1990 Gleaning Project reported a 23.6 per cent increase in food donations.

In 1995, the implementation of the Food Recovery Program collected surplus cooked and fresh food from restaurants and hotels. This food was redistributed to charitable food programs in member agencies. Special requirements for food handling and storage made this project more complex than other food reclamation.

Permission to proceed with the project was accomplished with strong liaison with the Board of Health, safe food handling training for staff and volunteers, and special equipment (like a refrigerated truck) provided through funding from the Winspear, Wild Rose and Edmonton Community Foundations.

Since 1996, the Food Bank has applied for and been granted waivers by the Capital Health Authority in order that the organization may accept and distribute wild game, specifically mule and white tail deer. This program is called Alberta Hunters Who Care by the volunteers who coordinate it. These waivers have contained up to twenty conditions including specific directions regarding storage times,



**SAFeway WAREHOUSE  
1986-89**

## Distributing the Food: Hamper Programs

processing, testing, documentation and handling of the deer from the time it is harvested until it is served in a soup kitchen or shelter. While there are similar programs operating in other provinces and most of the United States, Edmonton's Food Bank is the only organization in Alberta operating such a program.



SCOUTS • 1995

The Plant a Row—  
Grow a Row  
Project was initially  
started in Winnipeg  
in 1985 and came to  
Edmonton in 1998.  
The Edmonton  
Horticultural Society  
and Edmonton's Food  
Bank sponsor this  
program in Edmonton  
and area that invites  
local gardeners to grow  
an extra row of  
vegetables, or earmark

extra fruit and vegetables for donation to  
Edmonton's Food Bank. In 2000, the  
program became national with sponsorship  
of the Canadian Association of Food Banks,  
the Composting Council of Canada and the  
Garden Writers' Association of America.

### Depots

The first depot opened in April, 1984 at the Thorncliffe Shopping Centre as a regional drop-off and hamper sorting area. This allowed the public to have convenient locations to make donations and provided recipients easier access for picking up hampers. By November a second depot was opened in a Mill Woods school and the Association was trying to identify an appropriate site for a third depot in the city's northeast. The Grant MacEwan Community College Mill Woods Campus provided more suitable space the following year.

At the same time that regional depots were being developed, churches and community groups around the city undertook to provide pick-up opportunities for clients of the Food Bank who did not live in the inner city. By 1983 as demand for hampers increased, the percentage of clients outside of the inner city rose to 65 per cent. Food security issues were now recognized as a city-wide phenomenon. These food pantries or cupboards were run by volunteers and had specific days and hours of operation. Their volunteers handled the "screening" of requests for hampers and, using the guidelines established by the Gleaners Association, filled hampers for their neighbourhood clients.

By 1986, however, the increasing demands were starting to cause volunteer burnout in these community-based groups, sapping their energy and their resources. To address

the first issue of “burn-out,” the Board investigated and implemented a plan to organize larger decentralized depots that could combine the resources and volunteers of several smaller group or church programs. The second issue of growing dependence of some of the clients demanded a new program that could address the other underlying reasons for long-term food security problems. This was the start of the Supplemental Hamper Program.

## Emergency Hampers

At first the Edmonton Gleaners Association gleaned surplus food for meal and snack programs offered in the member agencies. Very quickly, however, it became obvious that there were people who needed emergency food supplies—because they did not qualify for social assistance or because their cheques were delayed or not anticipated for weeks after applying for an assistance program.

The member agencies and churches handed out these emergency supplies as their resources allowed. However, by 1983, as demand for “emergency hampers” increased, the volunteers discovered that many users waited until all their food was gone. Many also came in for more than one hamper in a three-month period. The Edmonton Gleaners Association grew concerned about providing nutritional balance in the hampers. A comprehensive program was designed to increase the hampers’ uniformity and nutritional value.

The slight decrease in demand in 1984 after the advocacy work of the Board was only a brief respite. Edmonton’s Food Bank and member agencies noticed growing demand before the middle of 1985, and it continued at an alarming rate into 1986. (The increase between March and April for example was 42 per cent.) The Board responded by creating a new Emergency Program that included a tightened screening process. This process was not instituted to deny access to emergency food, but to ensure that those requesting the assistance had tried all avenues of assistance. It was part of an advocacy effort to educate and empower the individuals to obtain all the social services to which they were entitled. It was also a method of ensuring that those who approached the Food Bank would be referred to the member agencies which could best meet their needs in terms of help with shelter, child care, job training and search assistance, etc.

In 1990 the Central Screening pilot project was initiated. Focusing initially on the northeast of the city, the staff and volunteers at the Central Warehouse began to handle all the screening to determine a client’s need for referrals, training, and, when necessary, the emergency hamper. It was done to alleviate the strain on agencies and churches that relied on volunteers to keep their programs going. It also provided an opportunity to assess if the Edmonton Gleaners Association could improve its ability to provide direct connections by screening clients consistently at the central location. When the results were presented at the 1990 Annual General Meeting, the member agencies voted overwhelmingly to expand the program to the whole city over two or three years.

*During 1983 the Food Bank’s hamper program alone increased by 700 per cent in terms of people fed. By October 1984 the total amount of emergency food being distributed was five times what it had been in January 1983.*

*—from Hunger in our City:  
A question of Responsibility, 1985*

## Advocating for Clients

In the early 1990s, monthly statistics for people fed rose from 12,000 to 14,000 per month very quickly. The Board of Directors and the member agencies felt yet another program was necessary to deal with what was becoming a food security crisis.



**SAFeway WAREHOUSE  
1988**

### Supplemental Hampers

The Supplemental Hamper Program was designed to assist those forced to use the Emergency Hamper

Program on an ongoing basis. Member agencies identified individuals and families who could benefit from greater levels of support to pursue alternative assistance. After they were referred to the program, they were assisted with food supplies but also provided information about and referrals to different sources of assistance available in the community.

Within the first year, 500 frequent-use clients were identified and referred to the Supplemental Hamper Program. Their shift out of the Emergency Hamper Program caused a noted decline in resources required there. The program was deemed a success and continued to receive United Way funding in subsequent years.

Over the years, the Edmonton Gleaners Association has developed two aspects of advocacy on behalf of the individuals and families who come to Edmonton's Food Bank for food. The first is to help those individuals and families gain access to the existing programs for social assistance more effectively. The second aspect involves urging the Government of Alberta to develop more effective income security programs and policies.

The Edmonton Gleaners Association got its first taste of advocacy in the fall of 1983. After two successful years of gleaning and distributing food, the surge in demand for emergency food hampers caused the Board to respond to those they felt responsible for the hunger they were asked to address. The Board sent a letter to Social Services Minister Neil Webber about the effect of recent social allowance cutbacks. It would not be the last time they communicated with the Minister of Social Services. The Government's response to their letter was that no one had any hard data about the issue.

This sparked the Board into finding out who was using Edmonton's Food Bank. Initially, the Boyle Street Health Centre surveyed their clients to find out about their Food Bank use. In June, members of the Board and staff met with a representative of Alberta Social Services, Bob Maxwell, to discuss the issue of conducting a study. The Association hired students to research and the Alberta Social Services Department participated with the member agencies to determine causes of Food Bank use. In



November 1984, however, they pulled out of the consulting group and then proceeded to release new social allowance rates and guidelines—without consultation with their previous partners.

The Food Bank and its 91 member agencies continued on without the government representatives. In February, 1985, they released their report *Hunger in Our City: a question of responsibility*, which criticized the department's method of determining the standard measures of actual costs for basic necessities on which they based the social assistance rates.

Due to the higher profile of food banks, a debate began in the media and in some social service agencies about whether their continued operation. A backlash campaign advocated “forcing the government's hand” by closing the food banks that allowed them to abrogate their responsibilities. The Edmonton Gleaners Association was reluctant to abandon clients without guarantees that income security measures would improve. The option of using the clients as pawns in a political battle would mean that no one won.

As part of a public awareness campaign in January, 1986, letters to all government officials ensured that they had up-to-date, accurate information about the Edmonton Gleaners Association. Seven hundred fifty copies of *Hunger in Our City* were distributed and an update sent to the Minister of Social Services and Community Health requesting information on the

status of the implementation of their recommendations. Every effort was made to assure the Department and the Minister of their desire to address the issue of food security in Edmonton.

A severe blow to the Association came in November, 1987 when the Alberta Social Services *Income Security Manual* was reissued and distributed to all Income Security social workers. It specifically mentioned as part of the department's procedure making referrals to community agencies like the Food Bank. The Board of the Edmonton Gleaners Association saw this major policy shift of the Department, again made without consultation, as having a direct effect on the Food Bank. It confirmed their worst fears that the Food Bank was in danger of becoming institutionalized, rather than being a community response to a community issue of individual disadvantage.

The Edmonton Gleaners Association and their 91 member agencies called upon Alberta Social Services in a formal, public statement, to stop making referrals to the Edmonton Food Bank. The Board's refusal to take the policy change without a fight paid off. The Edmonton Food Bank recorded the lowest demand in years during the month of January 1988. Their insistence on

*On a more pragmatic level we must ask ourselves if we are capable of ensuring that this service is provided to everyone who needs it? Despite the perceptions to the contrary, the Food Bank is a fragile, seat-of-the-pants operation, often incapable of ensuring supply next month, much less next year or into the 1990s.*

*—from the resolution of the  
Edmonton Gleaners  
Association Agency Members,  
December 10, 1987*



**HERITAGE FESTIVAL  
FOOD DRIVE • 1996**

clarifying the department's intentions and ensuring that the social workers were exhausting all the options on behalf of their clients marked a turning point in their relationship with Alberta Social Services and their clients.



SUMMER 1990

The next research project undertaken by the Gleaners Association concerned single social assistance recipients whose welfare rates suffered the highest levels of cuts in 1987. *The Singles Survey* found an increasing frequency of use of Edmonton's Food Bank by singles in great and continuing need for

basic sustenance. Approximately 75.8 per cent of the singles coming to the Food Bank cited their only source of income as Welfare and their need had increased since benefits were slashed. "Based on our survey findings, it is clear that Alberta Social Services seldom offers effective emergency food help to their clients, a situation made worse by the low levels of basic assistance that make emergency situations frequent and inevitable." (, p. 14) When it was released in April of 1988, it received critical acclaim from many workers in the social services community.

In December, 1988, after months of criticism, the 1988-89 budget of Alberta Social Services increased food allowances

by 13.5 per cent. The Gleaners Association was as quick to applaud as it was to criticize. In 1990, the Edmonton Gleaners Association noted that Social Services reforms to simplify and ensure equalization of benefits seemed to have a positive effect on Edmonton's Food Bank demand.

Their own programs were also seen as contributing to this trend. "While many external factors like an improved local economy also contributed to this improvement, it is very clear that the clients we empower with knowledge and information are better able to utilize other government and community resources." (Report of the Executive Director, Annual Report, 1990)

The release of the Edmonton Food Policy Council's survey in 1991 identified 80,000 people in Edmonton as being hungry or at risk of being hungry. The Council involved many Alberta Government departments, not just Social Services, in focus groups and discussions about possible solutions to the issues raised in the survey. The conclusion was that the effects of poverty were broader than Social Assistance measures could address.

In this cause the Board of the Food Bank received support from a private foundation. In 1992, The Muttart Foundation extended funding to assist the Edmonton Gleaners Association to move towards finding ways of eliminating hunger in the community, to provide more public education on the root causes of hunger, and to carry out more advocacy activities. The Food Policy

## Working with Others

Council released their recommendations and focused media and public attention on their solutions for reducing hunger in Edmonton.

In 1996, with the assistance of the Edmonton Social Planning Council, the Food Bank released *Two Paychecks Away: Social Policy and Hunger in Edmonton*, which revealed that one in 20 Edmontonians has received assistance at some time. They followed the report up with meetings at all levels of government in 1997 to continue their advocacy efforts. In conjunction with the Edmonton Social Planning Council, they developed a new survey of users which was issued in 1998.

The 1999 collaboration with the Edmonton Social Planning Council generated a study entitled *Often Hungry, Sometimes Homeless* which discusses the relationship between shelter and food security issues, especially for social assistance recipients.



HERITAGE FESTIVAL  
FOOD DRIVE • 1987

In the fall of 1984, members of the Edmonton Gleaners Association and Director Gerard Kennedy conceived of a plan to coordinate the efforts of other Food Banks across Canada. They proposed to host the first national food bank conference in the spring of the following year.

The conference was declared a success. Next a committee worked out the details of forming a national association. In the meantime, regional groups were formed along provincial lines to assist the food banks to network and, where possible, share information and resources.

The second national conference was held in Toronto in 1985 and the Canadian Association of Food Banks was created in 1988. The first HungerCount containing national statistics on food programs was compiled and released in 1989.

In 1993, Edmonton again played host to the National Food Bank Conference. Over 400 communities, representing every province in Canada, sent delegates to explore the theme, "Making Canada Hunger-Free." The major emphasis was on advocacy and lobbying, areas which all the members present recognized as essential for creating an atmosphere conducive to change.

*I just had the opportunity to review your survey done on singles who use the Food Bank.*

*I must say that over the last 21 years, this is by far one of the best presentations that I have yet seen on research information. I would like to compliment the Food Bank and in particular Doug Hunter who, in conjunction with J.P. Lebourgeois of our department, was able to come up with such a fine document.*

*—from Maria David Evans to Brian Bechtel, March 21, 1988.*



Allen S. Webb

## Volunteer and Community Support

✦ Begun in 1981 as a group of concerned individuals, the Board of Directors of the Edmonton Gleaners Association and their member agencies draw volunteers from a wide segment of the community.

✦ The Edmonton Gleaners Association became a United Way Partner agency in 1983.

✦ Special events in the community began early in the history of the Food Bank. The first “brown bag” campaign in conjunction with Canada Safeway and the Edmonton Journal provided instructions to providing nutritious food on the back of a paper grocery bag which could be deposited at the popular Edmonton Heritage Festival in Hawrelak Park.

✦ Volunteers, staff, and the media all marvelled at the generosity of the citizens of Edmonton. During the rapid increase in demand for Food Bank resources in the early 1990s, new food drives like those associated with Candy Cane Lane and the Cans Festival (sculptures of donated cans at West Edmonton Mall) raised record amounts of food donations.

✦ The Board and volunteers over saw some 700 special events and food drives in 1999.

✦ Record volunteer contributions reached around the 50,000 hours per year.

✦ Most of the work in the Food Bank could not be accomplished without the voluntary contributions of hundreds of Edmontonians.

*“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has.”*

*—Margaret Mead, Culture and Commitment, 1970, cited in Gleanings, August, 1999.*



**“PICKING ROOTS”**  
BY ALLEN SAPP

## A Message from the Chair of the Board of Directors

### *Board Chairs*

<i>Janet Hughes</i>	1981-1983
<i>Phil Byrne</i>	1984-1986
<i>William de Vos</i>	1987-1990
<i>Jim Casey</i>	1991-1992
<i>Elizabeth Johnson</i>	1993-1994
<i>William de Vos</i>	1995-1997
<i>Eleanor Boddy</i>	1998-2001

### *Executive Directors*

<i>Gerard Kennedy</i>	1983-1986
<i>Brian Bechtel</i>	1986-1989
<i>Marjorie Bencz</i>	1989-2001

### *Honourary Chairperson*

<i>Cathy Borst</i>	1998-2001
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On January 16, 1981, the Edmonton Gleaners Association, which is better known as Edmonton's Food Bank, became incorporated as a society and Canada's first Food Bank was born. At the time, no one could have predicted that the organization would become a vital instrument of caring in our community.

It is with mixed feelings that Edmonton's Food Bank acknowledges our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary as an organization. It is unfortunate that the need for a Food Bank in Edmonton continues. At the same time, we wish to acknowledge the truly outstanding contributions that have been made to our organization by volunteers, staff, donors and other supporters throughout the years.

Edmonton's Food Bank has organized several activities to acknowledge our anniversary, including the researching, writing, printing and distributing of this book. Due to financial restraints and the sheer scope of this project, it is impossible to list the thousands of individuals, businesses, funders and supporters who have supported the work of the Food Bank with a vision of making our community hunger free. In order to be truly thoughtful in our acknowledgements, we would need to publish an encyclopedia rather than a twenty page book! Please accept this letter as our expression of gratitude for **your** contributions.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to express our many thanks to the following who assisted in the development of this book: Sherry Allenson, Patty Bencz, Bill deVos, Beckie Garber-Conrad, Janet Hughes, Jack Little, Parcom Marketing and Quebecor World Jasper. Our deepest appreciation to Kathryn Ivany for researching and writing this book.

Thank you for sharing!

Eleanor Boddy





## *Our mission is...*

*To be stewards in the collection of  
surplus and donated food for the  
effective distribution, free of charge, to  
people in need in our community.*

