

# Legacy *Matters*



Harvest House V Volunteers

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# Smart Investment Food Security in the Valley



Harvest House at the Shelton River Walk is stocked with thousands of nonperishable food items to be distributed to Valley food banks.



VCF President & CEO Sharon Closius lends a helping hand with Harvest House. Volunteers are needed for all Valley food banks. Call 203-926-9478 if you are interested in volunteering.



At workshops like this one at Massaro Community Farm, participants learn pickling and other tips to make the harvest last.



Chef Audra Wiesel digs in Ansonia with neighborhood kids to create a community garden space.

Cover Image:

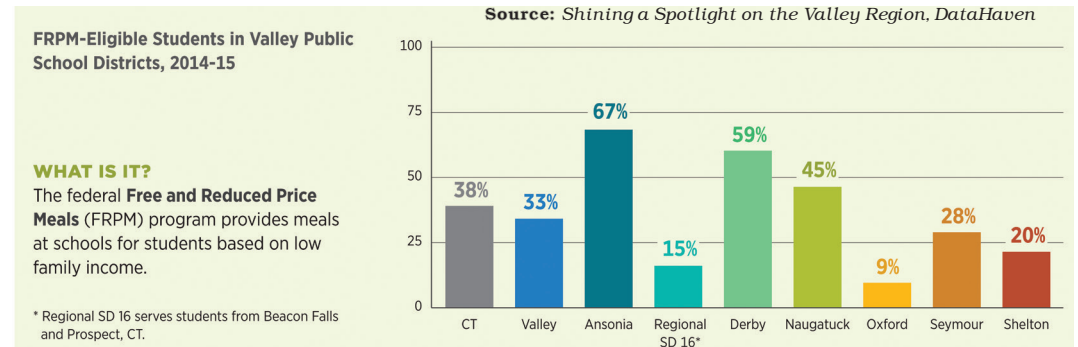
Volunteers take a group photo after stocking the shelves with food at Harvest House V in 2013

Whether you lead a gluten-free, vegan lifestyle or just occasionally watch what you eat, many people have food choices and access to healthy food options. This is not the case for all residents of the Valley. Some of our neighbors live in what are called “food deserts.”

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines food deserts as neighborhoods that lack healthy food sources resulting from factors related to distance and income. Food deserts can include communities that are located some distance away from access points to healthy foods or in neighborhoods where nutritious food choices are available but not affordable based on income levels of residents nearby. Both examples are contributing factors to food insecurity.

One way businesses and individuals in the Valley have helped address and raise awareness about food insecurity is with the construction of Harvest House. Driven by Valley United Way’s Corporate Volunteer Council, a 400 square-foot house is constructed of walls made of shelves. The shelves are then stocked with more than 100,000 donated nonperishable food items and distributed to food banks in the Valley. Since the first event in 2005, six Harvest Houses have been built, once every other year, with the next scheduled to be constructed in September of 2017.

“In 2005, the food lasted for three months. By 2013, the food was distributed within three weeks,” says Vice President of Community Engagement, Patricia Tarasovic, who leads the Volunteer Action Center at Valley United Way. “The outcomes from this project, supported by the recent Community Index data,



*The number of Ansonia and Derby students receiving free and reduced price meals is greater than neighboring Valley towns. The wellbeing of these children is of concern over the summer when food access diminishes because school is out.*

There is a negative correlation between food insecurity and overall well-being. According to the 2016 Valley Community Index, some residents in the Valley said they could not afford food for themselves or their families within the past year. The 12 percent of adults who reported experiencing food insecurity suffered from a significantly lower level of well-being than their income alone would predict. Further correlations to mental health and overall well-being can be made in relation to food insecurity. More than 30 percent of food insecure adults reported feeling depressed during the past year, indicating that food insecurity is a multi-faceted challenge.

make it very clear that we do have a food insecurity issue here in the Valley, which we are actively taking steps to address.”

This is why the Valley Council for Health and Human Services created the Food Security Task Force in 2014, co-chaired by Tarasovic along with David Morgan, President/CEO of TEAM, Inc.

“Addressing food-need is a complex issue, including systemic challenges and opportunities to long-term positive outcomes,” Morgan says. “This task force adds immense value to the long-term collective impact efforts in addressing food insecurity and overall household well-being throughout our Valley communities.”

*(continued...)*

# Smart Investment Food Security in the Valley

Many children and families of low-income households risk developing chronic health issues such as diabetes, hypertension, and obesity as a result of inexpensive high-sodium, carbohydrate-rich diets. The task force is charged with strengthening food security in the region by partnering with local organizations that share this goal, developing and supporting a Valley food bank network, and creating a long-term strategic plan.

“If you look at the number of free and reduced price meals (FRPM) in the 2016 Valley Community Index, more than 60 percent of Ansonia’s children and over 50 percent of Derby’s require this assistance,” says Valley United Way President & COO, Sharon Gibson Ellis. “As we have seen in our ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) report, this typically means not a lot of money is flowing into the household and families may be making difficult decisions about food, utilities, or healthcare.”

As such, organizations like Valley United Way are introducing community gardens to bring more fresh fruits and vegetables with the “Grow Your Own” program. Started in 2014, this food security and health program is designed to engage neighborhood residents to actively participate in selecting, planting, maintaining, harvesting, and preserving fresh produce. These gardens are located at Pine Lot Park, Gatison Park and Irving School.

Community garden projects were launched in Ansonia and Derby in response to the number of children on FRPM programs. Other Valley towns have far fewer students eligible for school meal assistance. The only nutritional meal some

students receive is during the school day, which can make the summer months especially difficult.

Fortunately, for those needing assistance, a summer food program was implemented by the USDA and is administered by the Bureau of Health and Nutrition Services at the Connecticut Department of Education.

Students under 18 (21 if disabled) are encouraged to get a free meal at specific sites no matter their family’s income or residency. The Connecticut

Learning in Schools, this effort is a partnership between the Yale-Griffin Prevention Research Center, Griffin Hospital, the Naugatuck Valley school districts and other community partners. VITAHLS promotes healthy lifestyle choices, obesity prevention activities, and nutritional education for Valley students from pre-K to grade 12. In recent years, the Naugatuck Valley Health District, Naugatuck Public Schools, Massaro

*Many children and families of low-income households risk developing chronic health such as diabetes, hypertension, and obesity as a result of inexpensive high-sodium, carbohydrate-rich diets.*



*The “Grow Your Own” program started as backyard container gardening and has grown to include community gardens in Ansonia’s Gatison Park (pictured), Pine Lot Park and at Derby’s Irving School.*

Food Bank, End Hunger Connecticut, and the Valley school systems have open and registration-based summer meal programs that are updated with new information annually.

The VITAHLS program is additionally working to create healthy lifestyles for students. An acronym for Valley Initiative to Advance Health &

Community Farm, ShopRite Supermarket, and Valley YMCA have also joined the VITAHLS partnership.

More so than ever before, a growing number of Valley nonprofits, corporations, and individuals are coming to the table to ensure proper nutrition and basic access to food are an option on everyone’s menu.

# Featured Fund

## Guarerra Family Fund

For Bert Guarerra, a Shelton native, and her husband, Jim, a longtime Shelton resident, it just makes sense to give to the Valley — the place they live, worked as school teachers for many years, and raised their children.

“There is a really strong sense of community here. So many people know and help so many other people,” says Bert.

The Guarerras have significantly supported the St. Vincent de Paul Thrift Shop and Food Bank in Derby. The facility opened its doors in 1990, thanks to help from Jim Guarerra and a small group of local citizens. St. Vincent de Paul receives clothing donations to stock the thrift shop, which serves as a low-cost shopping alternative while generating income for the food bank that serves the Valley’s hungry. Jim currently serves on St. Vincent de Paul’s board as Secretary.

“There’s absolutely a need for food for the needy in the Valley,” says Guarerra, who has been a volunteer at St. Vincent de Paul for nearly three decades.

When Jim saw the impact of the organization he helped create, he wanted to do even more. So, he and his wife established The Guarerra Family Fund with the Valley Community Foundation (VCF) in 2009.

The Guarerras credit the Pagliaro family for encouraging them to start a fund.

“We’ve been friends with the Pagliaro Family for longer than I can



*“We created our Fund at VCF to help not only St. Vincent de Paul, but also Valley children who are going through difficult times.*

*This is something that we expect our children will continue long after we are gone.”*

*– Bert and Jim Guarerra  
The Guarerra Family Fund*

remember and we have supported their philanthropy through VCF. We decided the time was right for us to create a fund of our own for something we care passionately about,” recalls Jim.

Remy Kocurek, Director of St. Vincent de Paul of the Valley, says the Guarerra family’s contributions have been invaluable for their organization.

Not only does Jim give regularly of his time, he and his wife have given through their family fund and during The Great Give®.

“Last year, Jim asked friends and family to donate to St. Vincent de Paul in his honor instead of giving him gifts for his birthday,” says Kocurek.

Other ways Jim has helped included securing gravy for Thanksgiving when it was running low at the food bank and procuring furniture from houses about to go up for sale.

As educators, the Guarerras saw first-hand how important it is to help a child whose family is struggling to make ends meet.

“You can just see how much difference you can make in their lives,” says Bert. “It’s all about helping out where you can.”

The Guarerra Family Fund is a donor advised fund that enables the Guarerras to have direct input into where their money is distributed. Jim says their giving leans toward addressing food insecurities, education, and the arts.

“Having our fund at VCF is all-encompassing for us,” he says. “The fact that this is a Valley organization, where local groups can go for help, is so beneficial. We especially like that we can recommend distributions, which makes it even more meaningful for what we are trying to accomplish.”

The Guarerras intend to support the Valley community through their fund for many years to come.

“We’re grateful that VCF exists to help those who really can use our support, both now and in the future,” says the couple.

## Planned Giving

*The Gates Society is the Foundation’s planned giving community. Your planned gift will impact the charities you’re passionate about forever, regardless of the amount.*

*Call us at 203-751-9162 or learn more at [valleyfoundation.org](http://valleyfoundation.org)*



# Community Investment Annual Reception Grants Highlights

For those unable to attend the Annual Reception on May 9, three grant recipients shared what funding support from VCF has meant to their organizations and those they serve.

Ken Roberts, Communications Director at **Griffin Hospital**, spoke about the Advance Care Planning Program, which received support through the Responsive Grant process. The Hospital instituted its own Advance Care Planning project after learning of the ground-breaking program at Gunderson Medical Center in Wisconsin.

“A staggering 98 percent of patients aged 50 years or older who died at Gunderson had an advance directive or advance care plan in place. Gunderson’s remarkable success was featured in a CBS segment, in which community members spoke with ease about the importance of, and need for, advance care plans to ensure that one’s wishes were honored should they become incapacitated and unable to make healthcare decisions for themselves,” said Roberts.

Thanks to the infusion of dollars from VCF’s Responsive Grant program, 38 percent of Griffin’s patients had an advance care directive in place in October 2016. This is up from 16 percent of patients having plans in place in 2015 and only 6 percent of patients in 2014.

Roberts said, “Our hope is that families will experience peace of mind when they know that their loved one already has plans in place for their care.”

Kyle Kelley, Executive Director of **Seymour Ambulance**, shared how VCF’s initial support through its Needs and Opportunities grant program helped leverage additional equipment for the Ambulance Corps.

“With ongoing changes to communication requirements in our town, we submitted a grant application to VCF to replace our aging radios,” said Kelley. The Corps was able to purchase ten radios (six more than originally requested) thanks to some shrewd comparison shopping.

“Ensuring our personnel are adequately



equipped is critically important to public safety. This grant enables us to appropriately outfit more of our first responders with the proper equipment and the ability to communicate with our dispatch center, our officers, and the police department while responding to an emergency,” said Kelley.

**College Access for All Kids** brought high school students Abba Bestman and Madeline Gomez (pictured above with advisor, Jessica Bedosky) to speak about the impact of a VCF Community Grant. Because of the grant, students were able to attend guided visits at universities in the tri-state area.

“It really helped us understand the difference between colleges and universities, gave us insight into what to look for in higher education, and helped us understand what life after high school will be like. We also learned about admissions so we could be better prepared for the application process,” said Gomez.

From the small Community Grants program, to Needs and Opportunities grants of up to \$10,000, to Responsive grants for projects, capacity building, and general operating support, VCF has made a growing impact in the Valley through its twelve years of existence. With support from generous donors, VCF will continue to address the changing needs of the Valley for years to come.

To learn more about the different types of grants, VCF’s range of community investments, or to view videos from this event, visit [valleyfoundation.org](http://valleyfoundation.org).

## Community Grants

VCF awarded nearly \$20,000 in grants to local community grants serving the Valley. Read more at [valleyfoundation.org](http://valleyfoundation.org).

## Sponsored Events

The following events are supported with unrestricted funds by VCF this season:

### June

#### **Derby Green Farmers’ Market**

Derby Green Farmers’ Market runs June 18 through October 29 on Derby’s Historic Elizabeth Street Green.

### July

#### **Annual Silver Tea**

The Derby Historical Society’s Annual Silver Tea will be served at LaSala Banquet Hall July 10 with Sheryl Faye as Eleanor Roosevelt, “The First Lady of the World.”

#### **Valley Shakespeare Festival**

Four free outdoor performances of William Shakespeare’s Comedy *Twelfth Night - Or What you Will* will take place from July 13-16 at 8 p.m. at the Shelton River Walk.

#### **Celebrate Shelton**

Shelton’s “Downtown Sounds” Summer Concert Series sounds off on July 21, July 28 and August 5 in Veterans Memorial Park with food trucks, artisans and more.

## The Great Give® 2017

With the help of Valley residents, employees and VCF donor-advised fund holders, nearly \$300,000 was raised in The Great Give 2017® for organizations located in the Valley. This includes \$25,000 in matching funds and prizes provided by VCF and others. Nearly \$1.3 Million was raised during the 36-hr campaign for nonprofits serving Greater New Haven. For the fifth consecutive year, VCF has been the second largest sponsor of the event.



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# Good News About the Valley

## Planned Giving: A Pivotal Priority for Philanthropy

The Valley is an incredibly special place. For many, the Valley has been home for generations and, even if unrelated, the people of the Valley are thought of as family.

Fixed between three of the state's neediest cities, the Valley has learned to take care of its own by making sure local programs and services help those in need.

In the past, much of the funding for such programs was made available by federal and state grants, as well as donations from individuals. As a result of

changes to our federal and state budgets, it can be difficult to increase local budgets to cover anything beyond necessities.

Making our communities stronger and more vibrant is becoming increasingly more dependent on its citizenry, who can share of their time, talent and treasure.

Typically, charitable contributions come from income and outright gifts because people tend to protect their long-term savings,

such as stocks, bonds, IRA's, and real estate. They do this because of the uncertainties that come in life, such as not knowing how much they will need as they age. People are living longer and don't want to be a burden on their loved ones. There is a strong movement in the nonprofit field to ask people to consider designating a portion of their estate to benefit charitable causes they cared about during their lifetime and to consider their community as an extended family member. Even if a small percentage is designated for charitable intentions, a meaningful legacy has been created.

Our Valley nonprofits are challenged with asking for gifts

for both their current needs as well as to be remembered in estate plans. Many organizations do not have the resources to devote to this dual messaging. It is also difficult for our nonprofits to individually compete with the numerous appeals donors receive from national and international causes, as well as higher educational institutions. Donors have more asks and options than ever before. That is why VCF is launching a community-wide planned giving initiative called the Valley Gives Back™.



We invite you to visit the new [valleygivesback.org](http://valleygivesback.org) website to learn about the many ways you can give back to your Valley community.

The Valley Gives Back™ seeks to build the resources available in the Valley through planned giving. There are great vehicles to support charities while also leveraging tax implications, many of which do not alter one's current financial situation.

We will be working with both Valley nonprofits and professional advisors to help spread the word to support this effort. VCF will be available as a resource, as

we work to build the development capacity of our region's nonprofits. Although donors do not have to work through VCF to establish a planned gift, the Foundation can provide unique options to meet their philanthropic goals.

With marketing materials, workshops and a new single-source website, [valleygivesback.org](http://valleygivesback.org), we hope to demystify how planned giving works and show how easy it is to make an impact without changing your currently lifestyle. All it takes is a conversation with your trusted advisor. In the meantime, visit [valleygivesback.org](http://valleygivesback.org) and tell us what you think! Please call our office at (203) 751-9162 and share your feedback.