

SPRING | SUMMER
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ISSUE

News from Second Harvest Heartland

HEARTLAND CONNECTION





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◀ **COVER:** Second Harvest Heartland joins our hunger-relief partners statewide in celebrating universal school meals for Minnesota children, which became law on March 17, 2023. Free meals for all children will begin in the fall. Studies have shown that making school meals universal reduces the stigma sometimes associated with free and reduced-price lunches and ensures that all children have the nutrition they need to learn and play.

Stay in the know with recent highlights:

► Our new **Rising Partners** program helps grassroots hunger-relief programs become sustainable organizations through **grant funding and training** on topics including nonprofit board development, grant writing and more. These programs serve overlooked or underserved communities, and they face barriers to accessing traditional sources of funding and support. Rising Partners has three enrolled programs.

► Our third annual **24-Hour Harvest** Giving Day exceeded its goal of raising enough funds for over 1 million meals—reaching a total of **1,773,291 meals!** We're in awe of the incredible support from our community, including 4,571 donors who came together in a big way to help end hunger. Special thanks to our generous sponsors, restaurant partners, volunteers, staff, and other community partners for making this special day possible.

► **Zach Rodvold** has joined Second Harvest Heartland as **Director of Government Affairs**. Zach brings more than 20 years of experience working in politics and policymaking at the state and federal levels. He will help increase our visibility and expand our advocacy work to advance policies that help end hunger—starting with a strong, bipartisan farm bill.

► We are expanding our work helping people **access hunger-related resources**. New technology and increased staff will allow us to better serve people calling Second Harvest Heartland with a range of food-related needs, from meals to grocery money. Through a **new contact center**, we will provide information and help with program applications.

► Join us for an evening of fun and festivities at the **20th Annual Dish Gala**, Saturday October 14. Thank you, Cub, for returning as our presenting sponsor! Find more information at **dish.2harvest.org**.

► A study we commissioned on **Latino experiences with SNAP** (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) found that some Latino families who qualify for SNAP do not apply because of lack of information or concerns about effects on their immigration status or their children's future. These insights will help inform our outreach to Spanish-speaking communities.

► **CEO Allison O'Toole** has been appointed to the **President's Council on Sports, Fitness & Nutrition**. She looks forward to bringing Second Harvest Heartland's ideas and hunger-relief innovations to Washington, D.C., and working with other leaders to ensure everyone can thrive through active lifestyles and access to nutritious food.

Dear friend,

There are days when I feel like pinching myself because I lead the best team in town and they're doing some of the most important work there is. They are smart, creative, ambitious, and also—maybe most importantly—ready to learn.

There's been a lot of learning over the past few years. We've learned what works: deploying restaurants to make delicious meals from food-bank ingredients, going all-in on SNAP (because there's no better way to fight hunger than to get grocery money into people's pockets), and making sure kids are fed at school (because that's where many kids find most of their nutrition).

We know what works. We know how to move the needle on hunger. Together, we can end hunger in Minnesota if we make that our goal.

At Second Harvest Heartland, we're taking everything we've learned and asking business leaders, elected leaders, community groups and more to bring their best ideas and come together around a shared hunger-fighting agenda.

I know that you are with us. In April, we asked you to donate the equivalent of one million meals in 24

hours, and you gave nearly double that. Thank you for believing in this organization.

We take your trust very seriously. I hope you'll see, in the pages ahead, why your partnership with Second Harvest Heartland matters. The Bread of Life Food Pantry, supplied by our food bank, is changing lives in North Minneapolis. Our support for grocers like Coborn's is making them food-rescue powerhouses across Minnesota. We're getting prepared meals to people who don't have the home or health to cook the groceries we offer. And we're doing it all with the help of joy-filled volunteers like Charli, who chose to spend her 10th birthday with us.

Thank you for your trust, your support and your continued partnership. We are making a difference. YOU are making a difference. Together, we can make hunger history.

With hope,



Allison O'Toole

ALLISON O'TOOLE
CEO, SECOND HARVEST
HEARTLAND



GET involved!

There are several meaningful ways to join the fight against hunger. Support critical Second Harvest Heartland programming with a donation, gather your friends, family or colleagues for a volunteer shift at our facility, or take action on the advocacy front today. Learn more at **2harvest.org/get-involved**.



Donate



Volunteer



Advocate



GIVING and FORGIVING

Bread of Life Food Pantry offers food and second chances

When FreedomWorks tried to buy a vacant property in North Minneapolis to create apartments for formerly incarcerated men, neighbors protested, says FreedomWorks Volunteer Coordinator Stephanie Tubman. “They didn’t want 140 felons on the block.”

Five years later, Tubman says these same neighbors are now some of FreedomWorks’ biggest fans.

In addition to offering transitional housing and post-prison reentry programming, the North Minneapolis

FreedomWorks site is also home to one of Second Harvest Heartland’s newest agency partners, the Bread of Life Food Pantry, which celebrated its one-year anniversary in June 2023.

Bread of Life is almost entirely staffed by FreedomWorks participants as volunteers. “We run it with participants,” says Tubman. “They do the majority of the work. They stock, clean, do inventory and they go with every shopper.”

Tubman explains that volunteers accompany every guest at the food



STEPHANIE TUBMAN
VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR

“I want to break down that stigma. People come through and find out that these are guys that care.”

pantry, letting them know about limits on high-demand items and helping them with the check-out process.

Tubman also encourages volunteers to tell their stories. “I want to break down that stigma,” she says. “People come through and find out that these are guys that care.”

Before each shift, Tubman gathers the volunteers and reminds them to smile, be kind and maintain the appearance of the shelves until the last guest leaves.

“Keep it looking pretty,” she tells the group. “We want the people who come through last not to feel like they’re getting scraps—we want them to feel like they’re getting just as much as the people who came through first.”

The food pantry is open every Wednesday at 5:00 p.m., and visitors begin arriving more than two hours early to wait in line. When check-in starts, they receive a number and sit in a seating area until their number is called.

Visits to the food pantry have increased every week since it opened, says Food Shelf Manager Judy Glasel. In 2022, 120,000 pounds of food were distributed to more than 5,000 households, mainly Latino neighborhood residents.

Glasel says she remembered her first visit to the food pantry well. “I walked in, and I could just feel the heart of the place,” she says.

To Tubman, the food pantry not only provides an important service to the neighborhood but an important opportunity for volunteers.

“In our addiction and former lives, we’ve done a lot of damage to the people around us and to our communities,” says Tubman, who was incarcerated herself. “FreedomWorks is all about reconciling with God, family and community.”

Tubman says she has seen the transformative power of service on the men’s lives first-hand. “It’s just amazing,” she says. “It’s amazing to see. This has given a lot of them a purpose. It’s given them joy. It’s that feeling of giving back.” ■

“I come here for food for me and my wife and my grandkids. We live just a few blocks away. It’s been very good and very helpful for our family. Money is low, and then with the recession, it’s hard. I just get what we need for the next two weeks. We’re not greedy—we only take what we need, because I know other people need food, too. If we’ve got some milk left, I don’t get milk. It’s been great. It’s a very uplifting place.”



PERCY MAGEE
FOOD PANTRY VISITOR



MIKE SCHLUESSLER
FOOD PANTRY VOLUNTEER

“Volunteering for the food shelf is probably one of the most satisfying things I’ve done in my life. To be a part of something bigger than me, to give back. I’ve never done good on parole. When you’re around negative people, it’s not good. There’s so many positive people around here—it’s life-changing. It’s just a better way of life. More giving. More forgiving. If it wasn’t for second chances, I wouldn’t be here.”

“Giving back to the community helps you stay focused on recovery and keep all the negative thoughts away. I’ve had some difficult things happen in my life recently, but as soon as I come here to volunteer, I feel good. I live here, and I encourage the other people to come and volunteer. To me, it’s part of the recovery. We greet people with a smile on our face and open arms.”



CHARLES MCALLISTER
FOOD PANTRY VOLUNTEER



MEAT, MILK & MORE

GROCCERS HELP FIGHT
HUNGER THROUGH
EXPANDED FOOD RESCUE

“Food rescue used to be all about bakery,” says Jean Jagodzinski, food rescue programs manager at Second Harvest Heartland. “Bakery is really safe to donate, and it’s really easy to donate because it doesn’t require refrigeration or freezer space.”

Expanding food rescue programs to include meat, dairy and produce has taken time and training, Jagodzinski says, but the results are worth it: decreased food waste and food shelves that can offer fresh options and well-rounded nutrition.

“You can walk into a food shelf today and see produce in a beautiful rainbow of colors, just like you would at a grocery store,” she says.

Last year, Second Harvest Heartland partnered with more than 600 food retailers to rescue more than 38 million pounds of unsold food, making food rescue Second Harvest Heartland’s single largest source of donated food.

Jagodzinski says Second Harvest Heartland serves as a vital link between grocers donating food and the food shelves that receive it, assuring both parties that food safety protocols are closely followed at every step. “They trust their reputation to us,” she says. “They know we’re paying attention to whether the food is being properly chilled, whether it’s six inches off the floor.”

Coborn’s has been a food rescue partner of Second Harvest Heartland for 15 years. The employee-owned chain has 66 stores across North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan, all of which donate unsold food to food shelves and meal programs in their surrounding communities.

According to Jeff Midas, Coborn’s strategic sourcing and procurement manager, their company aims to be a food-rescue leader in the grocery industry. Midas’ team makes regular visits to stores with their “roadshows,” designed to teach staff about food rescue practices. Following these visits, donations of rescued food have increased as much as 40%.

“We’re reeducating all the time to make sure that we are donating as

→ Jeff Midas,
Strategic Sourcing
and Procurement
Manager, Coborn’s



“WE’RE REEDUCATING ALL THE
TIME TO MAKE SURE THAT WE
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POSSIBLY CAN...”

much as we possibly can through this process,” says Midas, with a focus on produce and dairy products. “We can enhance in all different areas of our operation, but those are—no pun intended here—that’s our low hanging fruit.”

Coborn’s Senior Project Manager Scott Brooks says that each store has a scorecard keeping track of how much food they donate through food rescue. Having a reporting process and goals helps stores make sorting food for rescue a priority.

“It’s truly a win-win situation,” says Brooks. “We’re not wasting. We’re not putting organic waste into our landfill, and we’re helping folks.”

One food shelf that receives retail food rescue donations from Coborn’s is Second Harvest Heartland agency partner Catholic Charities Emergency Services Food Shelf in St. Cloud. Midas’ team toured the food shelf and saw firsthand how important retail food donations are to the hunger relief system.

“It moves you,” says Midas. “Something like this is so out of sight, out of mind because we’re here to sell groceries, take care of the customers. But to educate our people to see what we can do to help others—it’s a goodwill offering, and it touches me.”

Jagodzinski says Coborn’s is an example of how retailers can make an impact on hunger in their own communities. Food shelves and meal programs in Second Harvest Heartland’s partner network receive a majority of their food rescue donations through partnerships that are locally developed and maintained.

When grocers make a commitment to food rescue, even employees benefit, Jagodzinski says, because no one wants to throw out food that is still good to eat.

“We have the knowledge and tools we need to rescue food from every aisle of the grocery store. While there are still people going hungry, we simply can’t afford to let good food go to waste.” ■

4 MILLION MEALS

↓ Homi Mexican Restaurant in St. Paul is one of 18 Kitchen Coalition partners distributing a total of 25,000 meals each week.



Kitchen Coalition serves people who need more than groceries

“As far as we know, this hasn't been done on a scale like this before,” says Robin Manthie, director of Kitchen Coalition, a Second Harvest Heartland program that pairs donated and rescued food bank ingredients with for-profit restaurants to create meals for people who need them.

The three-year-old program reached a milestone in June 2023 of four million meals served.

A Covid-era innovation, Kitchen Coalition emerged from conversations with neighbors and community leaders who highlighted an underserved group: people who have barriers that prevent them from cooking, including mobility challenges, a lack of housing, mental health difficulties, and other concerns.

At the time, near-empty restaurants were struggling to stay afloat

and pay workers. Kitchen Coalition (formerly Minnesota Central Kitchen) put these restaurants to work preparing meals using ingredients from the Second Harvest Heartland food bank, and community-based nonprofit partners distributed the meals.

In three years, Kitchen Coalition has grown to distribute 25,000 meals a week. It has 18 partners in the restaurant and catering business, half of which are BIPOC-owned, and 75 nonprofit meal distribution partners. The program employs the equivalent of 80 full-time culinary workers and has invested more than \$17 million in local businesses.

“We're employing the neighborhood to feed the neighborhood,” says Manthie.

For chef Miguel Lopez of Homi Mexican Restaurant in St. Paul, which supplies 400 meals weekly for distribution in St. Paul's Frogtown

neighborhood, it's also a way for restaurants to support the community.

“Now that my family is in a position where we can help, we are taking that step forward. I see the need for meals being prepared for my community. Having the opportunity to do this for them, I say, ‘Yes!’” Lopez says.

Kitchen Coalition's meal distribution partners range from housing providers to mental health programs, community colleges, neighborhood-based organizations and more.

Manthie says a priority from the program's inception was to create meals that are culturally affirming for the communities they serve and to support a variety of needs and interests, including halal, vegetarian, Southeast Asian, soul food, and Mexican food.

Curries, rice congee and East African specialties are among the program's offerings. At Perspectives



ROSE & SON, JAYDEN

I started getting the meals about a year ago. I didn't have any income, so it helped a lot. A lot a lot. I'm very grateful for them. I don't have a car, and it's kind of hard to go on the bus with Jayden, especially when it's cold. And he's not a picky eater. He likes everything. I was in a shelter before I landed here. My other son had passed away. I came back here, and I've been doing good ever since. I'm very grateful and thankful for the meals, and I feel like they're made with love.

transitional housing for mothers and children, mothers say they like the rice and chicken best, and their children love the macaroni and cheese.

Kitchen Coalition is primarily funded by private donations, so Manthie is eager to see continued community support for the effort.

“We know that for 15% of those who are food insecure, a bag of groceries isn't the right solution,” Manthie says. “They need a prepared meal, and existing programs aren't meeting all of this need. Where people are food insecure, we need to offer both groceries and prepared meals!”

Following the success of Second Harvest Heartland's Kitchen Coalition program, Manthie is now helping other food banks launch Kitchen Coalition programs of their own. ■



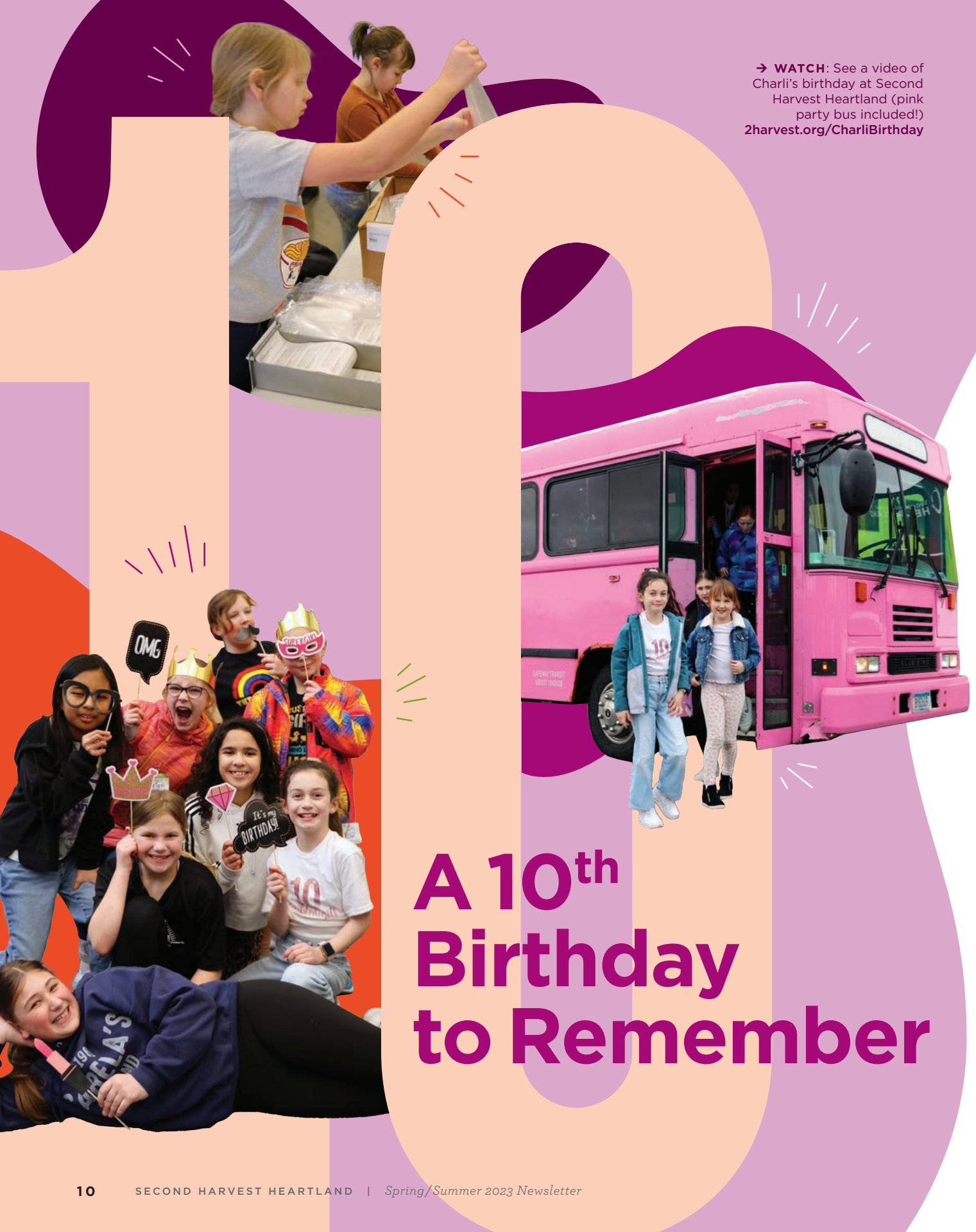
ADIA SINGH & DAUGHTER, KYA

After I graduated from nursing school, with all the COVID stuff happening, alcohol really affected me and my kids in a negative way, and then it wound up where I ended up having some strokes. These meals give me a healthy option to feed myself, and I kind of need that right now. Especially days when money is tight or I'm too overwhelmed with everything I have to do, to have something I can warm up for the kids has been really helpful. And for myself, too. It sure beats cracking a bag of chips open. Coming from the shelter and being low-income, you're used to just being thrown anything and expected to be grateful. For someone to take the time to prepare food and care what's in it, care that we like it—it means a lot more than people realize.

LEARN MORE ABOUT KITCHEN COALITION



↑ WATCH: Senior Director of Community Development Amano Dube on providing halal meals at the Brian Coyle Center during Ramadan. 2harvest.org/RamadanMeals



→ **WATCH:** See a video of Charli's birthday at Second Harvest Heartland (pink party bus included!) 2harvest.org/CharliBirthday

A 10th Birthday to Remember



Melissa Rosenthal says she was researching trampoline parks and other well-known birthday party destinations for her daughter Charli's 10th birthday when Charli said, "What about Second Harvest?"

The family had volunteered for a food packing shift a few months earlier, and Charli says it was so fun that she wanted to do it again, this time with all of her friends.

"I was like, 'Why not?'" Melissa says. "When I asked parents to save the date and told them what we were doing," Melissa says, "they all said, 'What a great idea for a birthday party!'"

Since Charli would turn 10 on March 10, the event would be called her "golden give-back birthday party."

"I have been waiting for my golden birthday for a long time now," Charli says, "so I thought this would be a great way to finally celebrate it and have so much fun with my friends."

On March 10, a hot pink "party bus" filled with Charli and 15 of her friends pulled up outside Second Harvest Heartland's main entrance.

The girls were welcomed by volunteer engagement ambassadors, who told them about the organization and explained their assignment for the day: filling bags with packaged fruit snacks to prepare them for distribution to our network of more

than 1,000 food shelves and other programs.

"I loved all of it," Charli says. "I loved packing the fruit snacks. It was very fun, especially because all my friends were there."

You walk away knowing that you can make an impact.

Melissa says the girls could hardly believe it when they heard how much food they had packed at the end of their shift. "The volunteer engagement team makes sure you walk away knowing first, that there's a hunger problem that requires all hands on deck, even little hands, and second, that you can make an impact."

"It's kind of cool how people are going to eat the food that we packed," Charli says. "I like the feeling of packing for others because I feel like I'm doing good deeds."

"I know that lots of kids have their birthday parties at SkyZone or Pump it Up," Charli says, "but I thought it was really cool that I was doing this because it was very different than other birthday parties. One of my friends said, 'This is a birthday I will never forget!'"

Plan your PARTY!

- + Second Harvest Heartland welcomes sports teams, school groups, summer camps, birthday parties, and more for youth volunteer sessions.
- + Packing sessions are about 1.5 hours and take place at our Brooklyn Park volunteer center.
- + A brief but thorough training session is provided.
- + Friendly staff will assist volunteers throughout.
- + Most packing sessions involve repacking produce or other foods from large containers into smaller bags for distribution to food shelves.
- + At the end of your session, you will learn how many meals your group packed.
- + Weekday and weekend time slots are available.
- + The room adjacent to the volunteer center may be reserved upon request.
- + Children ages 8 and up may participate.
- + One chaperone is required for every 10 youths up to age 15.
- + A group photo makes a fun memento.

Want to know more? Contact volunteer@2harvest.org



↑ Kia Chang, Houa Lor and Lue Lor. Photo Credit: Houa Lor

The Lor family runs a vegetable farm in Pine Island, MN, and is part of the Good Acre, a network of independent growers who are mostly immigrants or farmers of color. Second Harvest Heartland's food bank purchases produce through the Good Acre. Lue Lor and Kia Chang came to the United States as refugees from Laos and rented land to farm while they worked other jobs. "It has been a dream come true for my parents to be able to start from a quarter acre to now grow on 46 acres," said Houa Lor, their son. "Being able to stand on their own... and at the same time provide a service to the community." Learn more at: 2harvest.org/GoodAcre

