



*Building a Community Without Hunger*

# OUR HISTORY



Chatham Outreach Alliance  
40 Camp Drive  
Pittsboro, NC 27312  
919-542-5020

[WWW.CORAFoodPANTRY.ORG](http://WWW.CORAFoodPANTRY.ORG)

# A History of CORA

Chatham Outreach Alliance

Serving Chatham County Since 1989

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## Acknowledgements

With thanks to the past and present volunteers and staff members of CORA who shared their memories and stories about CORA with us.

Very special thanks goes to Jon Darling who patiently and with unfailing good humor worked with us on the formatting and editing of the many versions of this story.

We are indebted to Jim Farrington who showed us the value of professional editing.

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## Introduction

In July 1989, Chatham Outreach Alliance (CORA) provided food to its first clients, a family of six, two adults and four children. Twenty-six years later, in the fiscal year that ended in June 2014, 215 tons of food were distributed to our clients. CORA currently serves over 500 families each month. This is the story of how the program began and has grown over the past twenty-five years.

The success of CORA is due to the vision, generosity and hard work of hundreds of Chatham County citizens who put in hours of service as pantry volunteers, board members and fundraisers. CORA would not exist without the help of staff, local churches and businesses, county assistance, grants, food drives, generous donors and fundraising events. This CORA story is a tribute to all of these people and organizations.

Food insecurity is a hidden yet pervasive problem in Chatham County. CORA's clients are our fellow citizens who come from a variety of backgrounds, but all are marginalized by poverty. Many are the working poor: those who mow our lawns, assist our elderly, care for our children or work in other low-wage jobs. Some are disabled or elderly or children. Every day, volunteers at the pantry witness the resilience, tenacity and courage it takes for our clients to manage their lives on limited resources. A car breakdown or a medical emergency could mean going without food.

## 1989: How CORA Began

Every winter, St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church in Pittsboro organized a group to provide firewood for people in need within Chatham County. When visiting these homes, they found that people were not only in need of firewood but also in need of food. Rev. Bill Coolidge of St. Bart's invited representatives of Chatham County churches and public agencies to meet on January 24, 1989 to discuss county needs, including a food pantry. About 30 people, representing at least 12 churches and 5 public agencies, attended. [Appendix 1— Minutes of First Organizational Meeting]

Topics discussed included:

- Food Sources - the Food Bank of Central and Eastern North Carolina (CENC) in Raleigh charged \$.10/lb. for food
- Funding Sources - the Communities Responding to Overcome Poverty (CROP) Walk gave 25% to local hunger programs
- Location for a Pantry - there were no known options at that time



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On February 21, 1989, an exploratory group met. Three organizing churches were represented: St. Bart's (Pittsboro), United Methodist Church of Goldston, and Pittsboro Presbyterian Church. As a result of this meeting, Jay Olson (Pittsboro Presbyterian) visited the Interfaith Council in Chapel Hill and the Orange Congregations in Mission (OCIM) in Hillsborough to develop guidelines for establishing a food pantry.

## Getting Organized

A temporary Board of Directors for purposes of incorporation was established: Jim Hinkley (St. Bart's), Jay Olson (Pittsboro Presbyterian), Rev. Angus Cameron (United Methodist Church of Goldston) and Rev. L.W. Leake (6th Ave. Baptist Church, now known as First Missionary Baptist Church in Siler City).

## How Was CORA Governed?

Since its inception, CORA has had a Board of Directors. During the early years, each member church was allotted two voting delegates. The delegates elected an 11-member board annually. The Board then elected a 5-member Executive Committee which consisted of a President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, and a Delegate-at-Large. The Delegate-at-Large served as the coordinator of volunteers.

Two key groups met on June 1, 1989: the churches' Congregational Representatives and the Board of Delegates.

At the Congregational Representatives' meeting, Jim Hinkley was introduced as acting chairperson. A summary of Bylaws written by Jim Hinkley, Jay Olson, and Dave Shenton (St. Bart's) was presented and approved.

The churches represented at the meeting of the Congregational Representatives were:

- St. Bart's, Pittsboro
- Pittsboro Presbyterian Church
- United Methodist Church of Goldston
- Hickory Mountain Baptist Church, Siler City
- Church of God, Pittsboro
- Cedar Grove UMC, Pittsboro
- 6th Ave. 1st Baptist, Siler City
- Piney Grove UMC, Siler City
- New Salem Baptist Church, Pittsboro

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- Mitchell Chapel AMEZ, Pittsboro

At this point, CORA was incorporated under NC law, and had applied to the IRS for 501(c)(3) non-profit status. It also had been certified by the Food Bank of CENC to purchase food.

At the Board of Delegates meeting the first CORA Officers were elected:

- President: Jay Olson (Pittsboro Presbyterian)
- Vice President: John Meyer (St. Bart's)
- Acting Secretary: Dave Shenton (St. Bart's)
- Treasurer: Steve Clark (Hickory Mt. Baptist Church)
- At Large: Dave Shenton (St. Bart's)

Subsequently, Pat Cleary of the Cedar Grove United Methodist Church was elected Secretary of CORA.

Prospective member congregations were asked to give 1/2 of 1% of their church's previous year's operational budget. Member congregations were also asked to collect non-perishable food each month, hold a special offering and provide volunteers for the food pantry. The food pantry also was to receive 25% of the funds raised from the Chatham County CROP Walk.

CORA also received a \$1,500 grant from the Orange Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church, \$500 from the Women's Organization of St. Bart's, and \$130 from the Energy from Heaven organization. (Energy from Heaven was a community solar energy group from St. Bart's Church that made solar devices available to low-income, rural elderly using a combination of grants and loans).

The County provided space at the old Social Services building on Camp Drive in Pittsboro.



Camp Drive Building / Front



Camp Drive Building / CORA Entrance

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The building was originally a private hospital set up by Dr. Horton Camp. By the late 1980's, the hospital was no longer operating and the building was used by Chatham County Social Services. In 1989, when the Social Services offices moved to a new building, the County gave CORA two rooms in the building. One room was used for an office, and the other to store food. The County did not charge rent and the only cost to CORA was for telephone service.

In July 1989, CORA opened to serve its first clients. That year, 50 families received food.

By October 9, 1989, five churches had donated funds (1/2 of 1% of their previous year's operating budget) to CORA:

- St Bart's Episcopal Church
- Pittsboro Presbyterian Church
- Hickory Mountain Baptist Church, Siler City
- Brush Creek Baptist Church, Bear Creek
- Evan's Chapel, Siler City

## How the Pantry Operated

At the beginning, the pantry was open on an "on-call" basis. If a client needed food, the volunteer on call would be contacted and would get a pantry key from the Department of Social Services. The volunteer would put food in bags for the client. Jean Reeves, a volunteer at that time, reports that clients were primarily provided with canned vegetables, such as corn and green beans. There was not much canned fruit. Powdered milk and toilet paper were provided. Other foods requested included canned meats, dried beans, rice, grits, peanut butter, powdered milk, canned vegetables and low salt foods. The Bread Shop in Pittsboro donated day old bread. Meat was available only occasionally.

In its initial year, CORA established a policy of sending a "Thank You" note for large donations. In November 1989, Dave Shelton had a letter of appreciation sent to the bakery in Pittsboro for a donation of 100 loaves of bread and to the St. Bart's member who donated 50 pounds of frozen meat. The practice of sending these notes continues today.

## 1990: The Pantry Grows

By February of 1990, the Pantry had regularly scheduled office hours each weekday: 12:30PM to 4:30 PM on Monday, Wednesday and Friday and 9:30 AM to 12:30 PM on Tuesday and Thursday. It had also obtained a phone number - 919-542-5020 - which is still in use today.

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Clients needed a referral from a social service agency or church minister for each visit and a card was kept on file for every client. When the client came in, a volunteer would take the referral form and look up the client's card. Each client could visit the pantry up to four times a year. (In 2010, this was increased to six visits a year.)

Since the beginning, CORA has maintained statistics about the clientele it has served. Records have been kept of the number of families, detailing the number of adults and children, the total number of people served, their towns of residence and their referral sources. In the early years, volunteers Dorothy Hammett and Marye Kloster maintained a ledger and kept these statistics. [Appendix 2 — Page of Original 1989 Ledger]

## **Where the Food Came From**

Initially, food was purchased from the Food Bank of CENC in Raleigh. Once a week, Jay Olson drove to Raleigh to pick up the food. Staff members at the Food Bank were so impressed by Jay that he later became its Director of Operations and subsequently started its Durham branch.

Churches donated food. Member churches held monthly collections of canned food. St. Bart's established a "First Fruits Sunday," collecting canned fruit the first Sunday of every month.

CORA arranged to have a nutritionist, Jean McKnight, advise the Pantry about proper nutrition and how to establish nutritional guidelines for families.

In December 1990, CORA borrowed one freezer and purchased another at half price so it could accept frozen meat donations. CORA was also approved to receive surplus food from the USDA.

Also in December of 1990, CORA received an award from Governor Jim Martin for outstanding volunteer activity in Chatham County.

## **1991-2003: THE NEED FOR FOOD INCREASES**

By 1991, CORA had provided food to 253 families, 2 percent of the population of the county. CORA's food expenses were \$0.70 per day and total costs were \$0.85 per day when administrative costs were included. The clients were primarily people out of work or with reduced hours. They were divided almost equally between white and African-American clients.



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By the summer of 1993, the need for food had exceeded donations to CORA. David Shenton, then Board President, put out a call for help to the founding churches. Over \$20,000 was donated, temporarily stabilizing the organization.

In November of 1993, expenses were still a concern. Food expenditures had doubled since the summer, mostly due to an increase in the number of clients. The Board was continually challenged to keep up with the demand.

In 1994, Food Lion began providing CORA with late-date and damaged goods through the Second Harvest Food Bank, arranged by the Food Bank of CENC. The CROP Walk was continuing to grow, providing needed income. That year, 294 walkers participated and 40 churches made contributions.

By 1995, CORA had provided the equivalent of over 150,000 meals to 5,281 families since its inception. Of the founding church congregations, six continued with yearly contributions of 1/2 of 1% of their annual budgets, with most exceeding that amount. CORA also became associated with Carolina Hunters Who Care, which donated 550 pounds of venison.

In 1996, 300 families were served.

In 1997, Bob McConnaughey became the volunteer Pantry provisioner. Once a week, he ordered, picked up, and delivered 60 - 70 cases of food from Lowe's Foods in Pittsboro. (The Lowe's store was located where Piggly Wiggly is today). The Lowe's Food store had a "Green Points" program, whereby customers could earn points toward purchasing food. Bob used donated "Green Points" to help pay for the food orders. Bob was the person responsible for convincing Lowe's to stock low sodium soups and vegetables. CORA still provides them as healthier alternatives for its clients.

Bob also picked up food from the Durham Food Bank, located close to the Durham Ball Park. Once a week, he loaded his Volkswagen Beetle with 400 – 500 lbs. of food. The Durham Co-op weighed the food and sent Bob the bill. Later, Seth Cobler and Dan Clower, who had a pickup truck, helped Bob pick up and unload food. They also helped unload the truck carrying food from The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP). For 10 years, Bob kept statistics about the amount of food donated, picked up and distributed, until a pantry manager was hired. Bob and Seth still volunteer at CORA helping to unload trucks.

By 2003, there were 64 volunteers working at CORA with 11 of them on the Board. In the first six months of that year, 40,000 meals were distributed to 704 families. This was an increase of 12,000 meals over the same months of the previous year. Ultimately, 1,440 families were served during the entire year of 2003.

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### **The Board Faced Several Critical Issues:**

- How can we provide food for so many needy people?
- How can the Pantry get more volunteers?
- What can the Pantry do to increase funding?
- How can people from outlying areas access the Pantry?

### **Crisis Time 2004-2007 — Will CORA Survive?**

From May 2004 to April 2007, Board Members Diane Lyons and Sally Earnest had served as Pantry Managers. As the demands on the Pantry grew, storage and pantry space became a serious problem. The old Camp building's rooms were tiny; the waiting area was insufficient and had no handicapped facilities. With the increase in demand, off-site storage became essential. For a time, a building in Pittsboro owned by Bob McConnaughey was used but soon became inadequate.



Marci Whittaker & Lyndie Bracey

In September 2005, CORA contacted the Pittsboro Presbyterian Church which owned an old white house on the court house circle. The church allowed CORA to use several rooms in that building for storage, and CORA volunteers named it "The White House." This building had no heating or air conditioning but did have electricity. Winter sorting was done in the cold. There was no shelving and it was a constant challenge to protect the food from pest infestation. The frequent transfer of food to the pantry was inconvenient and required many volunteer resources. In addition, the house was scheduled for demolition.

In the fall of 2006, another problem arose when Chatham County announced plans to tear down the old Camp Building. The county could not guarantee that another building would be provided.

### **Taking it to the Next Level**

- November of 2006 was a critically important month in the history of CORA. It became very clear that the only way for CORA to survive was to make drastic changes. The duties and responsibilities of the volunteer pantry managers became overwhelming and there were no other volunteers ready to take on these tasks. With members moving on and off the board, it was becoming difficult to manage CORA's growth.
- Udo Koopmann had begun volunteering at CORA in early 2006 and joined the Board in

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August. He was elected president in March 2007, and led the organization through the most significant changes in its history. He served as Board President until 2010, and retired from the Board in 2012. [Appendix 3 — Udo’s Vision Statement]

- The Executive Service Corps, (ESC), a firm that provides affordable professional consulting to non-profit organizations to help them and their missions, was contacted. Julian Wachs, a consultant with ESC, guided the Board in its exploration of new directions.
- One of the most important decisions made at this time was to evolve from an all-volunteer organization to one with some paid staff.
- After much planning, the first paid staff member, Lyndie Bracey, was hired as Pantry Manager and began work on August 1, 2007. The Triangle Community Foundation of NC connects donors to compatible non-profit organizations. Lyndie’s position was underwritten by a grant from the Arthur Carlsen Charitable Foundation.
- It soon also became apparent that an Executive Director was needed to write grant proposals, do community outreach and oversee the entire organization. Marci Whittaker was hired to fill this position in September 2007.
- Much to the relief of all involved, the county offered CORA its present building at 40 Camp Drive which had been used by Mental Health Services. This building had many small rooms but with the help of a volunteer architect, Ted Brindrim, the space was reconfigured. The county initially granted use of the building for 5 years but this arrangement has been extended to the present time. In September, 2007, intense preparation began for the move. Sally Earnest, Diane Lyons and Lyndie Bracey painted, cleaned and readied the building. On September 29, 2007, CORA moved into the new building and, at least for the time being, had enough space to operate efficiently. [Appendix 4 — New Building Dedication Announcement]



CORA’s New Building located at 40 Camp Drive in Pittsboro

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## Dedication Ceremony and Open House

The dedication of the new building was held on December 6, 2007. Udo Koopman, President of the Board, presented opening remarks. Invited speakers were: Roxanne Gwyn, Chair of the event and former Board Chair; Dina Reynolds, Executive Director of United Way of Chatham County; Renee Paschal, Assistant County Manager; and Marci Whittaker, Executive Director of CORA.



Diane Lyons, Udo Koopmann, Sally Earnest

## 2008-2015 Significant Growth and Major Challenges

- Starting in January of 2008, Udo Koopmann and the Board initiated new (and current) days and hours of operation: Monday through Friday, from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM. It also started the volunteer two-shift system, from 10:00 AM to noon, and from noon to 2:00 PM. At this time, the Board began an extensive push to recruit more volunteers so there would be two volunteers for each shift. [Attachment — CORA Annual Review April 2008]
- 2008 also saw the first Volunteer Appreciation event, which was held at the Country Club of the Governor's Club.
- At the end of May 2008, Pilgrim's Pride, a major poultry plant in Siler City closed and CORA was inundated with new clients. Food was running out. For that June alone, the monthly food bill from Lowe's Foods was \$20,000. An appeal was made to the County Commissioners and they agreed to give CORA \$10,000 per month for four months. CORA leadership agreed to raise as much as they possibly could to make up the difference. With the cooperation of Chatham County and the Board, this challenge was met. [Appendix 5 — 2008 News Article: County Funding Assists CORA in Time of Need]
- In 2009, Board Member Pam Caruso began volunteering at CORA. At that time, client data were still recorded on large index cards, one per family. Once a week, volunteers entered this information into an Excel spreadsheet for statistics and analyses. This task took many hours. Paul Wolf, an interested donor, offered his services, which included experience in database programming. Pam and Paul worked together to develop a computerized system whereby client visits were entered directly into a database. Pam developed a training program and she and others trained about 75 volunteers to enter visit information during client intake. On July 2010, six months after the process began,



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CORA went live with the new client database. This new process enabled faster client processing, with quicker and easier data analysis.

- In 2011, Beth Budd was hired as Executive Director of CORA. Under Beth's leadership, CORA has grown substantially. Not only have grant dollars increased, but food costs have remained low through bulk buying and significantly increased food donations.
- Lyndie Bracey, the Food Pantry manager since 2007, has ensured that the pantry is well-organized and well-stocked. As a result, the shopping experience for both the client and volunteer is positive and easy. Lyndie orders food for the pantry and by judicious ordering, has been able to keep food costs down to \$.84 lb. as of December 2015.



**LEFT:** Our client, Maria, enjoying the fruit and vegetables! **RIGHT:** One of our volunteers helps a client shop.

## CORA's Major Funding Events



❖ **The CROP/Hunger Walk.** The CROP/Hunger Walk has been a major fundraising event since CORA began. CROP (Communities Responding to Overcome Poverty), was begun in the 1960s and is run by the Church World Service. Through this program, 25% of the money raised is given to local hunger-fighting agencies including food banks and community gardens. The remainder is given to an international hunger-fighting agency.

In 1989, Rev. Susan Cafferty, the Pastor of the Goldston United Methodist Church for 11 years, was asked by Jay Olson to organize a CROP Walk for Chatham County since she had

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previously organized Crop Walks in Graham. The first Chatham County Crop Walk was held in Pittsboro on Sunday, October 15, 1989. More than 50 people from Goldston UMC participated. This was outstanding attendance since the whole congregation consisted of 125 members. Over the years, Siler City, Pittsboro, and Goldston took turns hosting the Walk. In 1999, \$13,746 was raised and, rather than funds being sent internationally, over \$10,000 was sent to Eastern Carolina to aid flood victims from Hurricane Irene. [Appendix 6 — Map of First Crop Walk 1989]

In 2002, the CORA board decided to withdraw from the CROP walk to form its own Hunger Walk because of the increasing demand for food in Chatham County. This change allowed 100% of the funds raised to go to CORA. The Hunger Walk continued to grow and, in 2014, it grossed \$44,061.

- ❖ **Empty Bowls.** The Empty Bowls event is an international grassroots effort, begun in the 1980s, to raise awareness about hunger and to help stock food shelves. Guests are invited to purchase a simple meal of soup and bread and to keep a handcrafted bowl. The money raised is donated to organizations working to end hunger and food insecurity.

In 2010, Empty Bowls was begun in Chatham County by Cindy Bowen, a CORA Board Member. It was a small event held at the Pittsboro Street Fair. When Susan Rosenberg joined the Board, she and Cindy decided to hold a much bigger event. In 2011, it was held at the Chatham Community College and was a huge success. Local potters contributed hundreds of bowls, restaurants donated soups, musicians donated their talents and volunteers brought in desserts. In subsequent years, this event was held at the Senior Center in Pittsboro, Bella Donna Restaurant and Chatham Marketplace. In 2015, it was held at Hank's Chapel church hall and was the most successful event to date, raising over \$12,000. Empty Bowls has been growing and area residents look forward to it each year. In recent years, the meal has been expanded to include hors d'oeuvres, homemade bread and wonderful desserts provided by CORA volunteers.



Bowls Donated by Area Potters

## Grants and Community Support

Seventy percent of CORA's support comes from in and around Chatham County. These friends are the backbone of that local support: Carolina Meadows Community Grant Program, the Arthur Carlsen Charitable Fund of the Triangle Community Foundation, the

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Grace Jones Richardson Trust, the Carlson Family Foundation, the Galloway Ridge Charitable Fund, Central Electric Membership Corp., American Institutes for Research, RTI, Women of Fearington, the United Way of Chatham County, the Chatham County Government, Siler City Rotary, Pittsboro United Methodist Church, St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church, Pittsboro Presbyterian Church, Pleasant Hill United Methodist Church, Koonce Wooten and Haywood, LLP, the Anna Louise Reynolds Fund of the Triangle Community Foundation, Bynum United Methodist Church, the Goldston Lions Club and the hundreds of individuals and local businesses whose contributions make what we do possible. Support from regional and national companies and foundations has increased over the last five years, making it possible for CORA to meet increasing demand and expand the SNACK! and Backpack programs, which are described below. These include significant grants from Walmart Foundation, the Hillsdale Fund, BJ's Warehouse Foundation, Build-A-Bear Workshop Foundation, Food Lion Foundation, Maximus Foundation and the Duke Endowment. The growing number of supporters over the last eight years has made it possible for CORA to meet the ever-increasing demand for food support. CORA has never turned away any qualified applicant from our food pantry.

## CORA'S Newest Programs



### SNACK! — Supplemental Nutrition for Chatham Kids

In 2008, CORA consulted with Chatham County Social Services and a group of social workers to identify and begin addressing the unmet food needs in our communities. The most serious problem was identified as hunger/food insecurity among our county's children. Fifty percent of Chatham's public school children were, and still are, receiving free or low cost meals at school through the federal school lunch program because their families live at or near poverty level. A program was needed to provide meals to these children during the summer school vacation. CORA staff, Marci Whitaker and Lyndie Bracey, worked with Board member Cindy Bowen and Michelle Morehouse of Take and Eat Food Pantry to design such a program. Michelle had developed a similar program that provided food to school children to take home for weekends and holidays during the school year.

At the end of March 2009, work began on a pilot program for the summer. The first SNACK! program was launched with the cooperation of the Work First Program, Hispanic Liaison, the Take and Eat Food Pantry, Social Services, the youth of Pittsboro Latter Day Saints Church and many volunteers. Chapel Hill Tire donated \$3,000 to get the program off the ground and Marci Whittaker secured \$10,500 in additional funding. Some 177 children received an average of seven weeks of food that summer.

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In 2010, SNACK! saw improvements in the quantity and quality of food, distribution methods and availability for clients. Fresh fruit and carrot sticks were added to the menu and families even received a watermelon to celebrate the end of summer. Chatham Trades, a workshop for developmentally disabled adults, was contracted to package the food and deliver it to distribution sites. A total of 742 children received food in 2010.

Chatham County Schools played a larger role in 2011. They mailed information directly to families in the Federal free and reduced lunch program and confirmed eligibility of SNACK! clients. That year, 881 children received food. SNACK! distributed 7,869 weekly boxes, and 5,939 bags of fresh produce (over 25,000 apples). Rebecca Brochard was retained in 2012 as the first paid coordinator of the SNACK! program.

For the summer of 2015, 1,043 children were enrolled in the SNACK! program. There are now 16 distribution sites scattered across the county to provide convenient access. CORA has doubled the amount of fresh produce. Children receive apples, bananas, and three servings of vegetables each week, including green beans, potatoes, zucchini, yellow squash, peppers, onions, corn, and cucumbers. At the end of the program, each family still receives a watermelon.

## The Backpack Program

In 2010, CORA got involved with Chatham County Backpack Programs. The Backpack Program works through the schools to provide food for needy children during weekends and school breaks. The program represents a fine an example of a grassroots response to an obvious need.

There are currently 11 Chatham County schools participating in this program and approximately 500 children were supported in 2015. The schools use various ways to pack the food and the menu is up to the individual program.

Although CORA does not actually operate the program, we support it through food purchasing aid. Our access to suppliers and bulk buying helps reduce Backpack operating costs.

CORA accepts and stores both individual and bulk food donations for the program. CORA also provides tax receipts for donors upon request. In addition, CORA, with its 501 (c) (3) status, is able to offer some program funding through grants to assist newly organized, or struggling programs fulfill their mission.

## 2011 — The PORCH Program

PORCH is an all-volunteer grassroots organization founded in Chapel Hill in 2010. Its original mission was to collect and distribute food for families in Chapel Hill and Carrboro.



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Since its beginning, this program has spread to many other areas, and was begun in Chatham County in 2011. The communities with PORCH programs include Ferrington Village, Governor's Club, The Preserve at Jordan Lake, Miles Branch, Bynum, Redbud, and Potterstone. Since the PORCH program in Ferrington began in May 2011, it has collected over 46 tons of food, often approximately a ton of food per month, and has become CORA's largest single contributor of community-donated food.



One PORCH Ferrington Neighborhood's Monthly Donation

## All About Volunteers

Volunteers have been an essential part of CORA from the beginning. They work in a variety of jobs including the following:

- Client Services volunteers check in clients and help them shop.
- Stockers continually restock the shelves and also load and sort tons of food donated or purchased by CORA.
- Provisioners pick up food donated by grocery stores or purchased from food banks.
- Fundraising volunteers plan and staff events
- Community Outreach volunteers staff booths and spread the word of CORA's mission.
- Friends of CORA Garden, started in the spring of 2013 by Carol Newnam and a dedicated group of volunteer gardeners in Chatham County, gather to grow and deliver over 1,000 pounds of fresh organic produce each year to CORA.
- Local farmers, individual gardeners and Farmers Markets, donate seasonal produce.
- Board of Directors members oversee CORA with a special focus on fundraising and also volunteer at the pantry.

## Orientation, Training and Support for Volunteers

A formal orientation and volunteer training program was launched in 2009. Hilary Murray has been the trainer since its inception and currently works with assistance from Pam Somers. Computer training is included as an optional addition and the instructors are Pam Caruso and Susan Kelemen.

Volunteer Hub, an internet scheduling service, began in 2009. This program enables volunteers to sign up for shifts or make schedule changes online.

In 2011, CORA volunteer Aaron Robinson and other volunteers wrote a Spanish translation of the script used during client visits. Since Hispanics now comprise 23% of our clients, this has been very helpful.

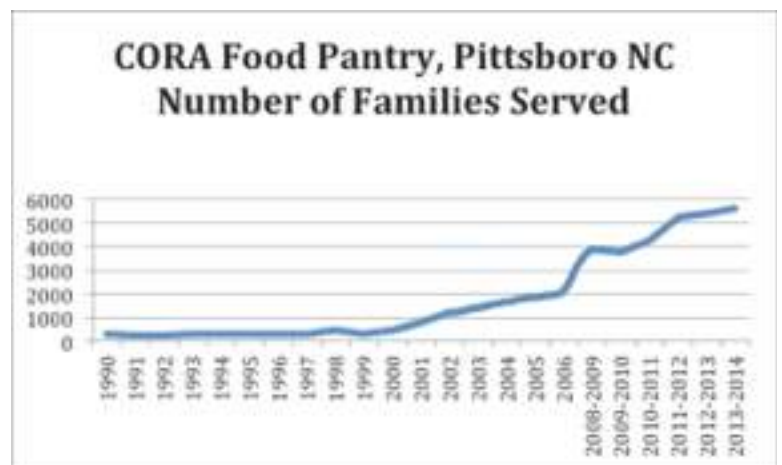
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Special volunteer events have been held regularly to express thanks for all the hard work and countless hours the volunteers have provided to CORA. At the event in 2015, the staff initiated a more formal recognition by giving exceptional volunteers special awards. Volunteers were asked to respond to two key questions: How can we make CORA better for our clients? How can we improve the volunteer experience? This provided some lively discussion and the feedback has been recorded. An advisory panel composed of volunteers was formed and many suggestions have already been implemented. More improvements are in the works!

## CORA Today

### Observations From Beth Budd, Our Executive Director

CORA's beginnings came at a critical time for Chatham County, a time when the economy was failing certain segments of society. The need for support has grown steadily over the last 26 years and has accelerated over the last few years with the closing of three important industries in our state: the chicken processing plants, furniture factories, and textile factories.



CORA has grown from feeding 253 families in 1990 to close to 6,000 families in 2015. During the last five years the number of people fed has increased from 13,726 in 2010 to 19,068 in 2015. The number of families served during that period has grown from 3,778 to 5,968, representing an increase of 58 percent.

We now have more than 200 volunteers and shifts working with clients have increased from 2 to up to 4 volunteers to keep up with the demand. Our stockers and provisioners have also increased in number and in days and hours worked in order to deliver and shelve all the food presently required.

Not surprisingly, the budget has risen from \$450,000 in 2008/2009 to around \$768,000 in 2014/2015. Excluding administrative and funding costs, CORA needs to raise \$500,000 in cash and \$200,000 in food donations annually in order to keep up with the increasing demand.

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## Statistical Summary of Food Donations for Fiscal Year 2014-2015:

- PORCH numbers: 36,578 lbs = 38% of Food Drives = 17% of all donated food
- Food Drives (includes PORCH): 96,312 lbs = 44% of all donated food
- CORA distributed 215 tons of food to 5,968 families (equivalent to 400,428 meals). 49.5% of the food was donated and 51.5% was purchased.
- For every dollar collected, \$0.89 goes directly to one of CORA's food programs

## How We Upped Our Game!

A long overdue and much appreciated ability to accept credit card donations has been implemented, making it easier for donors to make contributions. A contributor may also elect to have monthly debiting of a bank account. All of our technology has been upgraded; a revamped website now makes online donations possible.

We have a Facebook page and a Twitter account which gives better name recognition and ease of interaction between the public and CORA.

We now have the opportunity to network with a broader range of organizations, giving us more purchasing leverage. We are expanding our connections with other non-profit organizations in the county, enabling us to share information and develop good working relationships.

All of our printed materials have been redesigned and updated. The t-shirts for our annual Hunger Walk are redesigned every year and are a popular item!

Empty Bowls, our other major fundraiser, continues to grow in popularity and is a very successful Pittsboro-centric event.

Our Pantry Manager, Lyndie Bracey, is also our primary faith-based community liaison officer and is truly a proactive advocate for CORA.

## Ongoing Challenges

We have been in our current facility since 2007 and have clearly outgrown the space. We are working with the County Commissioners to explore possible expansion or to identify appropriate locations within Pittsboro that will allow us to expand and operate in a more efficient manner. In the meantime, we rented some temporary mobile storage units to enable us to store the extra food needed for the Holiday season.

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We have concerns about possible cuts to the Food Stamp program and the obvious growth in demand that that would produce. Also of concern is the rising cost of food.

Fundraising is always a challenge and we are still only able to serve about 25 percent of the eligible children who qualify for the summer SNACK! Program.

As our volunteer numbers have greatly expanded in the last 10 years, we have an ongoing need for an additional staff member to act as Volunteer Coordinator. This person would be responsible for fully utilizing volunteer abilities and interests.

### **CORA Is Not Just A Food Pantry**

**Clearly, CORA is a force in our community, working to restore dignity, health and self-sufficiency through food...with creativity, good humor and empathy. In spite of all life's difficulties, problems, disasters and heartbreak that come through our door, CORA is a HAPPY PLACE. Our goal is to have each client leave with a smile. Those of us who work here, staff and volunteers, are engaged with our community in multiple ways, and are committed to creating a better life for our neighbors.**



Left to Right: Donna Fehrenbach, Hilary Murray, Lyndie Bracey, Susan Kelemen, Beth Budd

**Sincerely,  
Beth Budd, Executive Director**

### **Stories From The Early Years**

- Marye Kloster, a volunteer, vividly recalled a memory from over 20 years ago. An 81 year old man came to the Camp building tearfully relating that his family lived in a mobile home with holes in the floor. His wife was blind and they were raising grandchildren. Marye gave him as much food as she could. He broke down in tears when thanking her. When she offered to help load the food, his 10-year-old grandson came to assist his grandfather.

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- CROP Walk Rally “World” Dinner

In 1991, members of the Goldston United Methodist Church invited people to a free rally dinner to raise interest in the upcoming CROP Walk. As each person entered the church, he or she was randomly assigned to one of 3 groups: First World, Second World, or Third World. The percentage of people assigned to each group corresponded to the percentage of people that actually live in the first, second or third world.

The “first world” group sat at tables with linens and china and had a multiple course dinner. The “second world” group sat in chairs around a center table and were fed rice, beans, and corn bread. The “third world” group sat on the floor and were given rice and bread.

Susan Cafferty, minister of the church at the time, said that this dinner made a lasting impression on the participants.

- In the early days, storage was very cramped — only 300 sq. ft., including pantry and office. One hot day, Chatham Together, which was in the same building as the Pantry, contacted CORA and complained about a terrible smell coming from one of the storage rooms. CORA had stored over 500 sweet potatoes on the floor in one small room. Marye Kloster, Sally Earnest and other volunteers had to haul them out and dispose of them. These problems were alleviated when CORA moved to its present building in 2007.

- The Little Beetle That Could

Starting in the late 1990’s Bob McConnaughey used his little Volkswagen Beetle weekly to pick up 400 – 500 lbs. of food for CORA from the Durham Food Bank. The Durham Food Bank staff would marvel at how much food the car could hold.

The Volkswagen Beetle was a 1969 beetle that Bob’s wife, Patty, had owned since 1972. For years, its license plate was “Meet the” which, as they were Beatles fans, was a reference to the First American record album done by the Beatles.

The Volkswagen Beetle still lives in Pittsboro. In February 2015, Bob’s wife, Patty, sold it to Vincente Diaz of Dias Automotive.

- Help from the Post Office

In May 1994, on the Saturday before Mother’s Day, postal workers from the Siler City Post Office loaded up a truck with food from the CORA Pantry and brought it to the Siler City Post Office where it was distributed to people in need. This practice went on for 2-3 years.



- 
- In 2001, a family refused canned food with regret because they were living in their car and had no way to open cans. In response, CORA volunteers Jay Olsen and Marye Kloster began stocking can openers in a desk drawer.
  - Sally Earnest, who was a very active volunteer herself, recalls that Roxanne Gwyn wore many hats when she was volunteering for CORA. She not only served as board president, but also as volunteer coordinator, pantry manager and sometimes as provisioner. When she decided in 2004 to step down from her duties to become a full-time seminary student, it took several people to fill her place. Her leadership at that critical time was truly the spark that held CORA together.

## Stories From Recent Years

- A volunteer was checking out at a local hardware store and mentioned that she was on her way to work a shift at the Food Pantry. The clerk responded that she could find only part time work -- 4 hours a day-- and she needed food for her children. She was encouraged to come to CORA for help. She got a referral and came in later that day.
- One client reported that she was very tired. She worked the night shift and looked after her grandchildren during the day because her daughter couldn't care for them. To compound matters, her husband was ill with a chronic disease and was unable to work. With all this happening, the volunteers were impressed that she still maintained a positive attitude.
- One of our volunteers was helping a client who seemed to be having difficulty walking. When asked if she was okay, the client said she was fine but had to wear her mother's shoes which were two sizes too small. She said she was hoping to save enough money to buy herself a pair of shoes.
- Occasionally, one of our contributing food stores sends surplus bouquets of flowers to the Pantry. A volunteer reported giving a bunch of the flowers to a young couple, whereupon the man knelt on one knee and proposed marriage to the girl. A moment of fun for everyone!
- The pantry manager tells the story of a family who came into the pantry just before Thanksgiving. While they were shopping, the manager popped a frozen turkey into their car as a surprise. Their young daughter was thrilled to find the turkey when they returned to the car, and she ran back to the manager and gave her a big hug!

- 
- While a couple were shopping at the pantry, the shy Hispanic mother spoke in halting English to a volunteer about the family's oldest son who is in his sophomore year at UNC Charlotte and doing well. The second son, after two years at a community college, has been accepted at NC State this fall and has been offered a full scholarship. Needless to say, these successful children are the pride and joy of this immigrant family, and these humble parents were so proud to share their happiness with us.

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## Appendix 1 — Minutes of First Organizational Meeting

FOOD PANTRY MEETING, Jan. 24, 1989

The meeting was 5 - 6 p.m. at St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church in Pittsboro. Approx. 30 people were there, representing at least 12 churches and about 5 public agencies. Jim Hinkley, of St. Bart's, chaired the meeting. The meeting opened with prayer by Rev. Leek of Siler City, followed by a discussion of the need for a Chatham Co. food pantry, citing the elderly and others who fall "through the cracks" and the illegal aliens who have taken up permanent residence in Chatham Co. The available resources were discussed and found to be inadequate to the need as it exists. For example, the Salvation Army, to maximize its resources, follows a 1 can/person/day for 7 days/year guideline of food distribution.

The discussion then turned to possible sources of food/funding for a food pantry. A CROP walk was one source. 25% of the donations would go to local hunger programs. This is being planned for this Fall for our area.

The Raleigh Food Bank, that gives away surplus food stuffs, charging \$.10/lb. handling fee, is another source of supply. They require a clean, sturdy storage area, which they inspect prior to giving out food. Finding such a site is to be a priority between now and the next meeting. Call Avis Autry, 542-2353, with suggestions of storage facilities. Ones with 40,000 sq. ft. and a walk in cooler are preferred. Access to the food bank is given once a week. Bring your own truck to carry away the food. Bob Suber of the Nat'l Guard figured that getting trucks would not be too difficult in a rural county like ours.

Other sources being investigated include: a \$3,000 start up grant through the Episcopal Church of N.C.; congregational programs of donating money and food; surplus from the farmer's markets; St. Andrews Potato project; donations through the local public schools; day old bread from local stores; PTA vouchers for clothing; weatherization materials from Lowe's; Waccamaw irregular blankets.

Some of the questions raised as needing attention in order to facilitate the success of such a venture in Chatham Co. were these:

- How many distribution points are needed?
- How should people be assigned to a particular point of distribution?
- How should the whole program be staffed?
- What hours are adequate?
- How can clients be held accountable for taking only what's needed?
- How can client's integrity be maintained?
- How can the food pantry cooperate with other care-giving agencies?
- How can the pantry make sure that there will be enough money/food to meet the demand?
- How will food be distributed: over the counter or self-service?

The next meeting was scheduled for Feb. 21, 5:00 p.m., at St. Bartholomew's - OR sooner, if space is found. The meeting was adjourned with prayer, offered by Pat Cleary, Cedar Grove United Methodist Church of north Chatham Co.

# Appendix 2 — Page of Original 1989 Ledger

CORA

Referring Agency	# Families	# Adults	# Children	Total Persons
Hoopes - 1	1	2	4	6
Family Violence & Rape Crisis - 1 Council on Aging - 1 DES - 3 Hoopes - 1	7	12	11	23
Chatham North Center - 1 Hoopes - 1	2	5	3	8
Home Health - 1 Council on Aging - 4	5	7	2	9
Home Health - 3 DES - 1 Council on Aging - 1 Chatham Counseling Center - 6 Family Violence & Rape Crisis - 1	16	23	25	48
Home Health - 2 DES - 8 Council on Aging - 1 Family Violence & Rape Crisis - 1 Chatham Counseling Center - 1	21	39	33	72

1989

City	Residences	Persons Adm.	# Meals	Helped Before	Continuing
1	Bear Creek - 1	30	166	0	F - 1 A - 2 C - 4 P - 4 M - 100
2	Pittsburg - 5 Silver City - 1 Bear Creek - 4	201	995	1	F - 8 A - 19 C - 15 P - 13 M - 418
2	Silver City - 1 Sanford - 1	200	576	0	F - 10 A - 17 C - 15 P - 30 M - 1178
1	Goldston - 1 Silver City - 1 Pittsburg - 3	24	294	0	F - 25 A - 26 C - 20 P - 46 M - 1088
	Bear Creek - 1 Silver City - 4 Pittsburg - 6 Mooresville - 2 Chapel Hill - 3	161	451	1	F - 21 A - 49 C - 45 P - 94 M - 2639
	Bear Creek - 1 Mooresville - 3 Sanford - 1 Bear Creek - 1 Chapel Hill - 1	200	1713	4	F - 53 A - 77 C - 78 P - 166 M - 5259

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## Appendix 3 — Udo's Vision Statement

### Vision for 2007/08/09

**MOTTO: EXPAND CORA'S MISSION AND DREAM AND THINK BIG!!!**  
(Meant to be thought provoking and ambitious)

1. Increase scope of service by 50% in 2007/08 and another 33% in 2008/09 by a combination of:
  - Elimination of 6 people limit per vista (calculate impact with current data)
  - Eliminate limit of 4 visits per 12 months period and increase to 6 in 2007/08, and 8 in 2008/09 while maintaining the element of "emergency" and "self-sufficiency".
  - Hand out food truly representing 3 meals/day/person for seven days per visit.
  - In line with above, increase office hours from 18 to 27 during 2007/8 and from 27 to 36 in 2008/9.
  - **Impact on need for additional funding, # of volunteers, provisioning and space!!!**
2. Possibly become independent from County with regard to space and build/lease own space suitable for long-term (2000 or more sqft) by 2009/10??
  - Lease vs. own
  - Property (\$/acre) and Building (\$100/sqft)
  - **However, negative impact on expense ratios**
3. Hire adequate staff for above extension of service
  - Executive Director (Grant Writing and Marketing/Branding)
  - Office Manager (Pantry Mgr/Volunteer Coordinator/Donor support)
  - Part-time vs. full time
4. Major fund raising campaign starting in 2007/08 with following parts:
  - Individual contributions (for example, newsletter and mailing lists)
  - Churches and civic organizations (eg. Rotary, Lions, Kiwanis, etc.)
  - Businesses and Corporations (develop data base and contacts)
  - Events (Hunger Walk and a few more)
  - Grant writing (Foundations, State, UW/County etc.)
  - Increase in-kind food procurements
  - Define targets and plans for each part
  - Find high profile honorary chair persons for each part (ceremonial only)
  - Find one or two volunteers to head each part (plan and implement)
5. Expand scope of Marketing/PR efforts to
  - Increase CORA's brand recognition
  - Increase awareness of CORA's mission and need of service
  - Increase target audience/donors in support of expansion
6. Major volunteer drive in support of above
  - Double #of volunteers by 2008/09
  - **Design plan and start now!!!**
7. Manage two most valuable assets: Volunteers and Donors
  - Database for Volunteers and points/time of contact
  - Database for Donors (at least last two years) and points/time of contact
  - Database for Food Drives and point/time of contact

08/09/2007 UKO — Udo Koopman



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## Appendix 4 — New Building Dedication Announcement



### **Dedication Ceremony & Open House December 6, 2007**

**2:30 p.m.**

#### **Opening Remarks**

Udo Koopmann, President, CORA

#### **Invited Speakers**

Roxane Gwyn, Dedication & Open House Chairperson  
Dina Reynolds, Executive Director, United Way of Chatham County  
Renee Pasqual, Assistant Chatham County Manager  
Marci Whittaker, Executive Director, CORA

#### **Dedication, Blessings & Ribbon Cutting**

Roxane Gwyn

**3:00 p.m.**

#### **Tour & Light Refreshments**

Lyndie Bracey, Pantry Manager, CORA &  
CORA Board of Directors

# Food pantry gets county funding <sup>2008</sup> in time of need

By Randall Rigsbee

A rocky economy and the recent closing of the Pilgrim's Pride poultry plant in Siler City, which resulted in hundreds of local jobs lost, have contributed to a growing demand for food from a local pantry.

Chatham Outreach Alliance (CORA) officials say demand at their food pantry in Pittsboro spiked sharply in June and they don't anticipate needs abating soon.

"We are optimistic in the long term we can meet demand, but in the short term ..." CORA president Udo Koopman told the Chatham County Board of Commissioners on Monday.

Koopman and CORA executive director Marci Whitaker met with commissioners seeking the county's help in meeting local needs and left the meeting with a commitment from commissioners to contribute up to \$40,000 to the agency over the next four months.

The increased demand for food is "beyond anything we imagined," said Whitaker.

"We are faced with a real crisis," added Koopman.

The agency, which is a non-profit, volunteer-operated founded in 1989 to help feed Chatham County residents who have a temporary need, has seen a big increase in the number of people needing help.

In June, the agency helped 1,700 people, a figure double the norm.

"Certainly Pilgrim's Pride's closing was a big factor," Whitaker observed.

While a number of Pilgrim's Pride workers have found other jobs or moved, "there are still a great number of people in Chatham County who have not been helped," Whitaker said.

So far this month, CORA has helped an average of 40 to 50 people every day.

"Our resources are limited," Whitaker said. "We're tapping into our reserves already."

The CORA officials asked commissioners for help to sustain the agency's work through summer. Whitaker said fall is when the agency receives its greatest number of donations.

"We hope if we can bridge

See 'Food' page 2-A

## Food

(Continued from page 1-A)

through the immediate months to the latter part of the year we'll have things under control," Whitaker said.

Commissioners were responsive.

"It's no secret this area has been hit hard with job losses," said commissioner Carl Thompson. "It's a real

problem."

The five-man board voted unanimously to help the agency with up to \$40,000 (or \$10,000 per month) for the next four months, a contribution CORA officials were grateful to receive.

"It sounds great," said Whitaker.



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**Attachment — Reproduction of CORA Annual Review April 2008**



**The Reproduction of  
CORA's Annual Review April 2008  
Begins on the Following Page.**



# ANNUAL REVIEW

April 2008

Feeding People In Need Since 1989

## Together We Can Stop Hunger in Chatham County!

By Udo Koopmann  
President

We are excited to present CORA's inaugural annual newsletter. In the past year CORA reached unprecedented levels of service with 8,240 client visits, representing 4,120 Chatham County residents. This amounts to an increase of 12.5% vs. the previous year and a five-fold increase since 2000.

Such dramatic developments stress all-volunteer organizations at all levels. Therefore, in order to secure

CORA's future, we developed a new strategic vision in 2006 for implementation in 2007 and 2008. This entailed the rewriting of our mission and vision statements, re-defining of our most critical issues, and developing an ambitious, yet realistic, financial plan.

At the top of the list of critical issues was the need for better and larger space and for hired professional help. We also recognized the need for a further increase in our service levels in terms of quality and quantity of food for our clients. Today, I am very pleased to report that we are well advanced on this roadmap for CORA's future. We now occupy a larger, more efficient facility. We also have two part-time professionals on staff, our new Executive Director Marci Whittaker and Pantry Manager Lyndie Bracey. Beginning January we have extended our pantry hours and are now open to

serve clients every weekday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Also, our list of food items given to clients has recently been re-evaluated and considerably enhanced, both nutritionally and quantitatively.

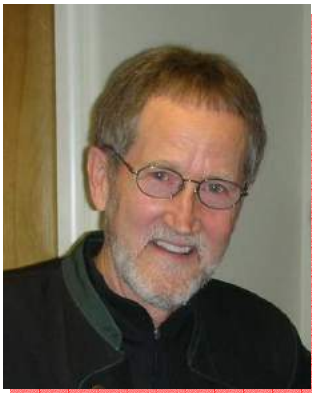
Our fundraising efforts are above budget. The 2007 Chatham Hunger Walk was our most successful fundraiser ever with more than \$30,000 collected. Our 2007 holiday food drive campaign also exceeded all previous records with donations carrying us well into 2008. Lowes Foods alone collected nearly five tons of canned goods. Donations from this year's holiday fund drive totaled nearly \$10,000. Other major new funding initiatives are on target.

Adlai Stevenson once stated that "a hungry man is not a free man." I view this to translate as our collective responsibility as citizens if a free society to combat hunger

whatever its cause may be and to do so in a non-discriminatory way. This is precisely CORA's main belief. And it would be our dream to see CORA's services grow to such an extent so that one day in the not-too-distant future we can all say that there is no man, no woman, no child or senior citizen going to bed hungry at night, at least not in Chatham County.

I feel confident that together we can make this dream come true in the knowledge that at the core of the people of Chatham County is a big heart and the passion to help our less fortunate neighbors.

To all our donors and volunteers a big "Thank You" for your generous contributions of food, time and money. You make all of this possible!



Udo Koopmann

## Poverty Growing in Chatham County

By Marci S. Whittaker  
Executive Director

Increased demand for food support signifies the growing impact of poverty in Chatham County. From 2000 to 2006 the number of families asking CORA for food support grew by more than 500%. Last fiscal year, the total number of people served by CORA was 8,240. In the first half of the present fiscal year the number grew to 4,346, which equates to 8,692 on an annualized basis.

In spite of the evident wealth in the northeastern part of Chatham County, elsewhere in the county many residents struggle to pay bills and feed their families. In 2004, 10.2% of Chatham County residents were living below the federal poverty line according to the US Census. That equates to more than 6,000 people. That figure is most likely higher today as Chatham County continues its

growth trend. Between 2000 and 2006 our population grew nearly 22%.<sup>1</sup>

### Pressure on pantries mounts

Growth in demand at food pantries across eastern North Carolina as well as throughout the U.S. continues to balloon. National news articles underscore this phenomenon.

A recent USA Today editorial noted the impact of diminished food supplies, "Making matters worse is that food supplies are

down, often sharply. One reason: Higher food prices mean the government isn't buying and giving away as much surplus food from farmers as it does when prices are down."<sup>2</sup>

### Poverty in North Carolina

Although not as extreme as in some other parts of the country, poverty throughout North Carolina is growing as well. The Central & Eastern North Carolina



## New Facility Provides Major Upgrade for CORA Operations

After years of operating out of its increasingly inadequate 73 Camp Drive facility, the food pantry relocated to the former Chatham County Mental Health office building located at 40 Camp Drive in Pittsboro in the Chatham County office complex on September 29<sup>th</sup> and began serving clients from the new location on Monday, October 1, 2007.

According to CORA's Executive Director, Marci Whittaker, "The demand for food pantry support has increased more than 500% since 2000, and it had become imperative for CORA to find and operate out of expanded facilities. The new location allows us to improve the quality of our service and add efficiency

and productivity to our operation."

On December 6th, the CORA held an open house and dedication ceremony for the new facility. Attendees included local officials and representatives, major supporters, and our many dedicated volunteers.

Udo Koopmann, CORA's President, opened the program and was followed by several speakers who offered



*Dedication Ceremony*

comments on the state of hunger in Chatham County and the vital role CORA has played in fighting this significant and growing problem throughout its 18 year history. Other speakers included: Roxane Gwyn, Dedication and Open House Chairperson; Marci Whittaker, Executive Director, CORA; George Lucier, Vice Chair, Chatham County Board of Commissioners; Myles Walburn, Board of Directors, Carolina Meadows; and Dina Reynolds, Executive Director, United Way of Chatham County.

Roxane Gwyn then dedicated the facility and performed the traditional ribbon cutting. Pantry Manager, Lyndie Bracey and the CORA Board of Directors then led a



*CORA's New Facility  
40 Camp Drive; Pittsboro*

tour of the food pantry, answering inquiries so all in attendance fully understood and appreciated how the Food Pantry operated.

Many attendees expressed their approval and satisfaction with CORA's new home and the substantial upgrade in services it now offers to those in need throughout Chatham County.

## Volunteers Make It Work

### Extra applause for CORA's Food Drive Coordinator

Jim Abrahamson has been one of CORA's most active volunteers. With the support of other volunteers, more than 25,000 pounds of canned goods have been brought in during the 2007 holiday season, bringing the year's total to more than 30,000 pounds. Lowes Foods' *Friends Feeding Friends* program produced

nearly 10,000 pounds alone, accounting for a third of the 2007 food drive total. Jim and his wife Marigold were chiefly responsible for picking up, sorting and delivering the Lowes' collection to CORA. Jim also meets with groups planning food drives as well as making presentations about CORA and its work.

### Volunteers Needed

As CORA grows, so does the need for dedicated volun-

teers. There are many ways to help, which in turn help all the people in need of CORA's service.

Positions currently available include Provisioning — Pick up and transport food from Durham Food Bank and local grocery stores; Sorting and Storing — Filling shelves with food donations; Food Pantry — Receiving and checking in clients and acting as shopping escort; Food

Drive Support — Pick up and transport of food (seasonal).

For more information on how you can help, contact CORA at (919)542-5020 or visit us online at [www.corafoodpantry.org](http://www.corafoodpantry.org).



*Left to right: Diane Lyons, Udo Koopmann and Sally Earnest*

## Gifts Make Purchase of Refrigerator Possible

A large capacity, reconditioned, commercial refrigerator was added to CORA's equipment inventory in December thanks to gifts from Triangle Community Foundation, the North Carolina State Employees Credit Union and other donors.

Dubbed "Big Bertha", the 49 cu.ft. unit expands CORA'S capacity to receive and distribute fresh food to its

clients. The fresh groceries, which include fruits, vegetables, deli items and baked



*Big Bertha barely makes it in the door*

goods soon to expire, are made available through Food Lion Fresh Foods program. Fresh goods are picked up by CORA volunteers two days a week. The fresh items provide a welcome enhancement to the canned and frozen items CORA regularly provides.

The \$1850 dollar refrigerator was purchased through Herndon Restaurant Equipment & Supplies in Durham.

### Volunteers of the Year

Diane Lyons and Sally Earnest recently received the first *Above & Beyond Award* from CORA President Udo Koopmann. The award will be presented annually to individuals who have provided outstanding volunteer service to CORA during the preceding year. A permanent plaque will be placed in the CORA offices.

## 19th Annual Chatham Hunger Walk a Big Success

The 2007 Chatham County Hunger Walk, held November 4, 2007 in Goldston, NC raised over \$30,000; a significant increase over last year that provided much needed funds to support CORA's continuing efforts to fight hunger in Chatham County.

The walk was officially started by Honorary Chairperson Roxane Gwyn, past president of CORA. Under clear skies to music provided by Virginia and the Carolinas, more than 150 walkers wearing complimentary T-shirts participated in groups or as individuals, traveling a 5K walk route through the streets of Goldston. Walkers were sponsored by donors who pledged funds in support of CORA. Donors could also designate a portion of their gift to

go to Church World Services, an organization that addresses hunger on a global basis.

CORA also received substantial support from the business community, with special thanks to the many generous sponsors, including: Chatham Chevrolet Buick Pontiac, Pittsboro Chevrolet, Pittsboro Together, Voller Realty & Construction, Ltd., Domicile Realty, GeneMax Services, Governors Club Realty, Greenscapes, Healthy Home Insulation, LLC., Integrated Mortgage Strategies, Ltd., Realty World Chatham Properties, Sanford Honda, and Travis Cox-Realty World.

The Hunger Walk would not have been possible without the help of the many volunteers. Members of the

Goldston United Methodist Church Adult I Sunday School Class organized and ran the event. Students from the Chatham Central High School Junior Beta Club distributed T-shirts, handed out fruit to walkers, and manned some of the rest stops.

This is CORA's major fundraising event each year, and we are all quite pleased to have received record donations. We must raise the bar every year to keep in step with the tremendous and growing demand for help in Chatham County. And every one of our endeavors depends on the many caring and compassionate individuals who share our common goal of helping to feed the less fortunate among us.



### New Food List

CORA's Board of Directors recently revised the food list that determines what the pantry's clients will receive. Both Phyllis Smith, NC Cooperative Extension Service nutritionist and a group of graduate students working under the supervision of Professor Alice Ammerman of the UNC School of Public Health have given a positive assessment of the new list. It was determined to have better nutritional balance and to provide substantially more food.

## Food Drives Keep Us Going

Chatham County residents contributed an astounding 25,000 pounds of food to the CORA Food Pantry during the last quarter of 2007, the greatest amount ever and nearly as much as we received from food drives the entire prior year.

Communities, schools, churches, and businesses held 25 food drives during the holiday period, and many other contributions were made directly by individuals. CORA even received 60 turkeys at Christmas from a Chatham County real estate agency, which certainly brightened the holiday for a number of families.

"We have never ceased to be amazed by the generosity of our neighbors. Giving to CORA has reached new heights," quoting our Executive Director, Marci Whittaker. "These contributions will help CORA feed hundreds of families in need in the coming months."

Food drives at year's end

have long been a vital part of stocking the shelves at the pantry for the winter and spring months. These donations comprise nearly 30 percent of all the food CORA distributes to those in temporary need. On average, CORA provides individuals and families with more than a ton of food on average each week.

Last fall, Whittaker said, 10 groups sponsoring food drives brought in 1,000 pounds or



more each. Lowes Foods at Chatham Crossing sponsored a drive that resulted in nearly 10,000 pounds of food, a 50 percent increase over the previous year. "We were extremely gratified by the response of our customers," said store manager Ray Weaver. "We consider CORA a very important initiative for Chatham County and we are pleased to be able to help our neighbors in need."

Other groups collecting food over the holidays included the Northwood High School through its Holiday Festival and Key Club, Horton Middle School, Moncure School, Woods Charter School, Community Independent School, Chatham County Community College, and Perry Harrison School. Communities



*Moncure School Food Drive*

and businesses included Governors Club, The Preserve, Curves in Pittsboro, North Carolina State Employee Credit Union, and McIntyre's Books in Fearington Village.

"This year's food drive donations certainly exceeded our expectations," said Jim Abrahamson, CORA's Food Drive Coordinator. "Yet, it is

always a struggle to keep up with the ever-expanding demand for temporary food within Chatham County. One of our goals is to encourage food drives during the rest of the year," Abrahamson added. "This will make it easier to keep our shelves stocked year round."

Whittaker noted that although winter is a tough period for people in difficult personal circumstances, summer can be hard as well because many low-income families depend on school lunch programs to help feed their children. During June through August that source goes away, causing a less obvious, yet very real hardship for some families."

Holding a food drive is fairly simple and the rewards are immeasurable. CORA provides guidance and ready-to-adapt masters for posters and handouts. For more information, contact Jim Abrahamson, Food Drive Coordination, at 542-7132.

**Our Mission**

The Chatham OutReach Alliance (CORA) is dedicated to acquiring and distributing food to Chatham County residents who have a need for temporary community support to keep themselves and their families fed.

CORA was founded in 1989. It is recognized as a 501(c)(3) charitable organization. Gifts to CORA are tax deductible to the fullest extent allowed by law.

The CORA Annual Report is published by the Chatham OutReach Alliance.

**Newsletter Editor**  
Howard Galer

**Board of Directors**

- Udo Koopmann  
President
- Howard Willett  
Treasurer
- Cindy Bowen  
Recording Secretary
- Jim Abrahamson  
Food Drive Coordinator
- Howard Galer  
Publicity Coordinator
- Chris Stonehouse  
Volunteer Coordinator
- Mary DeMare  
Leighton Loraine  
Bill Russell  
Marci Whittaker  
Executive Director

**Staff**

Lyndie Bracey  
Pantry Manager  
Marci Whittaker  
Executive Director

Chatham OutReach Alliance, Inc.  
Mailing Address:  
P.O. Box 1326  
Physical Address:  
40 Camp Drive  
Pittsboro, NC 27312  
(919) 542-5020  
[www.corafoodpantry.org](http://www.corafoodpantry.org)



**Meet the New Staff**

CORA has hired its first employees. Lyndie Bracey and Marci Whittaker have joined the organization as its Pantry Manager and Executive Director, respectively. Both positions are part-time and would not have been possible without the financial support of the Chatham County government and United Way of Chatham County.

Lyndie brings a unique blend of non-profit and research experience and strong organizational skills plus an enormous desire to help others. Marci's strength derives from a diverse business background, fundraising skills, communications expertise, and her successful track record of building relationships

with a broad range of non-profits and government agencies.



*Marci Whittaker, Udo Koopmann, Lyndie Bracey*

As Udo Koopmann, President of CORA, has aptly expressed, "It is difficult for me as well as other board members to view both Lyndie and Marci as employees when in just a short period of time

they have shown the same level of passion and commitment to our mission as we find in our highly dedicated group of volunteers. In fact, when Marci first became a candidate for Executive Director, we were all impressed with her extensive volunteer activities, which included CORA!

So, technically we are no longer an all volunteer organization, but the benefits of these decisions and what we can achieve going forward will be enormous. Coupled with our recent move into new facilities at 40 Camp Drive in Pittsboro, CORA stands ready to capitalize on its expanded resources."

**POVERTY**

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Food Bank offers these thought-provoking statistics:<sup>3</sup> Two year averages of the number of North Carolinians living below poverty grew from an estimated 985,000 to over 1.07 million between 2000 and 2002 – an increase of over 9 percent. In August 2003 Congressional Budget Office report shows that in 2000 the gap in income share and growth

among various income groups was the widest it has been since 1979; related National Bureau of Economic Research data suggest that the income gap is the widest it has been in 70 years.

**Continuing growth will drive demand**

As the Triangle's growth pushes to the west, Chatham County's disadvantaged population will expand as well. With this will be a growing demand on food pantries.

With government resources

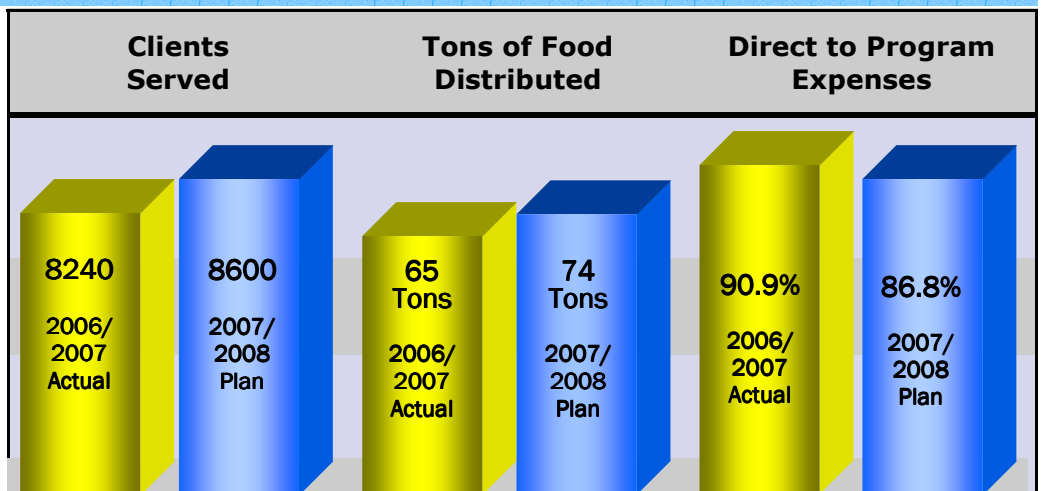
already stressed, private support will become ever more important to address the needs of those in crisis. CORA continues to develop and enhance programs to serve those who need our support.

<sup>1</sup><http://ncruralcenter.org/databank/profile.asp?county=Chatham#>

<sup>2</sup>Hunger amid plenty, USA Today, Nov. 21, 2007. Editorial <http://blogs.usatoday.com/oped/2007/11/hunger-amid-ample.html>

<sup>3</sup><http://content.foodbankcenc.org/education/poverty.asp>

**By the Numbers**





## Grants Make CORA's Programs Possible

Generous grants from public and private sources have enabled the many advances that CORA has made in its programs and service this past year. We are greatly appreciative of gifts from the following organizations:

**Carolina Meadows.** A gift of \$18,000 to support food purchases, Pantry Manager's

salary, and other program needs. This newsletter was also made possible through their generous grant.



**Chatham County.** A donation of the use of CORA's

facility and \$22,800 designated for the Executive Director's Salary.



**United Way of Chatham County.** A donation of \$8,925

designated for Pantry Manager salary and expenses.

**Triangle Community Foun-**

**ation.** A donation of \$1,099 was designated for the purchase of freezer and refrigeration equipment.



Many thanks to all of these organization for making CORA's programs possible.

## A CORA Success Story



**"Thank you CORA for being my new friends. Your help has meant so much."**

**Chandra Feggins**

Chandra Feggins came to CORA for food assistance after a succession of misfor-

tunes in the past several months. Living with a medical disability on a meager monthly social security check, she and her two teenaged sons were burnt out of her rental house in mid-January. Her sons were able to move in with relatives. With only a few items of clothing left, Chandra lived in motels for several weeks with the support of local churches. Other providers helped with vouchers for

clothing and a small amount of food at a local grocer. Then she had to sell her only remaining asset, her aging car, for just \$100 to get just enough for a few more nights in a motel. That's when she came to CORA. She told us that she had enough money to move into a nearby apartment, but she had nothing to eat. Moreover, she had no furniture and was sleeping on the floor with only a blanket.

Not only was CORA able to help with a generous supply of groceries, CORA volunteers mobilized to help find donations of dishes and kitchenware, a table and chairs, and other household goods. Just this week Chandra proudly told us that she was to start a new job the next day and also that she was going to take the assessment test for her GED in the coming weeks.

## The Photo Gallery



*Christmas turkeys delivered to CORA*

*Photos at right, 2007 Hunger Walk*



*Above, Hunger Walk Participants Below, Event Entertainment*



*Udo Koopmann & Howard Galer*



*CORA clients are welcomed*



*Food drives help keep CORA going*



*Food Drive Coordinator Jim Abramamson & wife Marigold*



*Volunteers keep shelves stocked*

# Food Drives July '07 through June '08

The following are the food drive sponsors for the second half of 2007. We have also included food drives planned to date for the first half of 2008. A hearty "Thank You" goes out to all.

- ♦ Back Solutions Chiropractic Bagwell, Holt, Smith, Tillman and Jones, PA
- ♦ Bethany Baptist Church Youth Group
- ♦ Buckhorn United Methodist Church
- ♦ Central Carolina Community College
- ♦ Chatham United Methodist Church
- ♦ Coldwell Banker—Howard Perry and Walston
- ♦ Community Independent School
- ♦ Church of the Latter Day Saints in Pittsboro
- ♦ Curves of Pittsboro
- ♦ Fearington Village Great Decisions
- ♦ Governors Club
- ♦ High Jump Software
- ♦ Horton Middle School
- ♦ Joyce Sirls
- ♦ Lowes Foods
- ♦ Lystra Baptist Church
- ♦ McIntyre's Books
- ♦ Michael's Bar and Grill

- ♦ Moncure School
- ♦ NC State Employees Credit Union  
Pittsboro Branch  
Siler City Branch  
Chatham Pkwy Branch
- ♦ Northwood H.S. Holiday Festival
- ♦ Northwood H. S. Key Club
- ♦ Perry Harrison School
- ♦ Starbucks Coffee
- ♦ Summerhill Community
- ♦ St. Bart's Youth Group
- ♦ The Bread Shop
- ♦ The Preserve
- ♦ Woods Charter School Center

## 2008 Drives

### January '08

- ♦ Brown's Chapel/Pleasant Hill UMCs
- ♦ Chatham County Girl Scouts
- ♦ Fearington UNC Alumni Club
- ♦ The Woods in Fearington

### February '08

- ♦ Chatham County Democratic Party
- ♦ Cub Pack 93

### March '08

- ♦ Chatham Central High School
- ♦ Curves of Chatham Downs
- ♦ Curves of Pittsboro

## Planned Drives

### March '08

- ♦ Perry Harrison School

### April '08

- ♦ Carolina Meadows
- ♦ Governors Club
- ♦ J. S. Waters Middle School
- ♦ North Chatham School

### May '08

- ♦ The Preserve

### June '08

- ♦ Community Independent School

This newsletter was made possible through a generous grant from Carolina Meadows.



P.O Box 1326  
Pittsboro, NC 27312

Non Profit  
Organization  
PRSR STD  
PAID  
Pittsboro, NC  
Permit #25

## Get Involved!

What can YOU do to  
support the  
CORA Food Pantry?

Consider giving time,  
money, food or your  
S & H Greenpoints from  
Lowe's Foods.

For more information call  
(919) 542-5020 or visit  
our website at  
[www.corafoodpantry.org](http://www.corafoodpantry.org)

Feeding people in need since 1989.





## OUR HISTORY CONTINUED 2013 - 2021

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Since the publication of our first History of CORA, we have seen extraordinary development and growth within the organization. There have been significant increases in the number of people receiving assistance. In addition, the variety and quality of the food distributed have changed dramatically. Many thanks to our area farms, restaurants, grocery stores, businesses, and committed neighbors across Chatham County.

The considerable expansion in the number of neighborhoods currently providing food through PORCH Chatham and the generosity of so many individual donors have made all CORA's growth possible. Spearheading this activity with enthusiasm and vision are the Board and staff leadership, who have navigated through some rough COVID waters in the last couple of years. The entire staff feels connected and eager always to provide the best service possible, and it shows.

This new History of CORA tells the story in detail of the last seven years, culminating with the opening of the new CORA building. We hope to highlight the forward-thinking leaders who are constantly looking to improve and expand the service offered to our families. As well as foster dedication and joy among the staff, volunteers, and all who are connected to CORA.

~Hilary Murray, Pam Somers, & Linda Todd



# 2013-2015 Highlights

The following information is from the period from 2013 to 2015. One of the significant challenges was shifting the detailed Board planning efforts to sub-committees to make the monthly Board meetings more manageable. Two committees were formed: a Finance Committee and a Compensation Committee. New health benefits were added for the staff, and a formal employee review process was introduced.



*Pam Caruso was President of CORA from July 2011 to June 2015.*

A Space Committee was formed to address the Pantry's need for more room to store and distribute food effectively. Meetings were held with the County Board and staff to determine available options for expanded space.

An Electronic Media Strategy Committee was formed to determine how CORA should be using social media for communications and fundraising. A CORA webpage was set up as well as a Twitter account.

Scheduled appointments were introduced for families to smooth out the high volume periods. CORA served an average of 500 families per month at the start of the year.

CORA went from approximately 5,100 volunteer hours in 2013 to 5,700 hours in 2014, an 11% increase. The Executive Director formed a Volunteer Advisory Committee to help relieve the pantry management workload. The committee helped manage volunteer appreciation activities. Two volunteers also worked with the Executive Director on soliciting grants. There was a discussion of expanding CORA hours. The Board determined that new facilities were needed for the following reasons: a) there were issues with traffic flow through the Pantry, b) disabled neighbors did not have enough room to go through the Pantry, and c) there was not enough storage room. A larger pantry area, a larger waiting area, and a meeting room/workroom were needed to resolve these issues.

## Programs and Events

The Hunger Walk was held in November of 2012, and it raised \$47,000, which was its most successful year. A paid event planner organized Empty Bowls, which raised \$10,000. These two events were our major fundraisers, along with the Feinsein Challenge Letter Drive.

Food Lion retail recovery was started in 2014, significantly increasing food donations. The PORCH program was expanding and SNACK! expenses were increasing. There were 1,017 children served through SNACK! in 2014.

CORA launched a new round of strategic planning with a brainstorming session with the Board of Directors. The focus was on how to improve Pantry operations to meet increased demand more effectively, improve the SNACK! program, and improve fundraising strategies for both. They also explored transportation possibilities for neighbors, volunteer recruitment, and development.

In July 2013, CORA hit a record with 502 families, a 25% increase over July of the previous year. As part of CORA's 25th Anniversary celebration, the pantry planned to hold a Breakfast Open House on Friday, September 27. Local politicians, donors, etc., were invited, and tours were also arranged.

Pam Caruso noted that there were several accomplishments achieved during this time through the hard work of many people. CORA's growth required moving from a part-time staff of three to include a full-time Executive Director with broader responsibilities and a full-time Pantry Manager. A need for a formal employee review process meant an additional Board Committee to review Staff Compensation and Benefits was established. A formal five-year Strategic Plan was created. More complete financial records were put in place for the SNACK! and Backpack programs to track donations and expenses. A new Space Committee was created that began work with Chatham County that culminated in the new building being completed in 2022. The CORA Webpage was also created during this time. The biggest accomplishment was truly the ability to provide a good selection of foods as the demand for CORA's services was growing.



## KEY STATISTICS 2013 – 2015

- 12.8% increase in number of client visits.
- Increased individual contributions by 28%.
- Increased food in-kind donations by 18%.
- Recruited more volunteers to support the increase in volume.
- Increased the number of distribution sites for the SNACK program, which helped the transportation issues.
- Increased the number of children the SNACK program serves, from 940 to 1052, a 12% increase.
- Reorganized the Pantry to make better use of space.



# 2016 Highlights

Early in the fiscal year, employee health insurance was implemented for the two full-time staff members, Beth Budd, Executive Director, and Lyndie Bracey, Pantry Manager. The website was refreshed to state CORA's mission, major programs, a staff directory, and the location of CORA. A new database was tested for volunteer use of family information that provided easier reporting for staff. The new Building Advisory Committee discussed the new proposed building layout and the reworking of the current Pantry and office space.

Jim Farrington, a long-time volunteer, and board member, received the Outstanding Volunteer of the Year award for Chatham County. The volunteer team finalized the CORA History project and presented to the Board. One hundred copies were published for use at events and distribution to major sponsors. The search for a full-time Volunteer Coordinator to handle volunteer concerns and for an Administrative Assistant did not bring any responses.

## Programs and Events

PORCH started a test run at Briar Chapel, resulting in 800 pounds of food. The community of Westfall was also added to the list of PORCH communities. PORCH had nine communities and raised 43,714 pounds of food. A PORCH Appreciation event for PORCH donors was held in the fall at Fearrington Village, which consistently collects a couple of thousand pounds of food monthly for CORA. An award was given to Jon and Roz Darling, who were instrumental in the running of PORCH in the Village.

The SNACK! program had 14 distribution sites around the county, and 1,056 children enrolled each week during the summer. Farmer Food Share provided fresh produce each week. All sites offered client choice. Over \$43,774 in donations were collected for SNACK!, primarily from Carolina Meadows. There were more than 100 donors from Carolina Meadows.

Empty Bowls had a successful event held indoors and outside at Hanks Chapel in Pittsboro. Two hundred six people attended, and the event raised \$15,405 in revenue. There was live music and lots of good food donated by restaurants and volunteers in the community. Thirty area potters graciously donated their work.

The Hunger Walk in 2016 raised \$42,759. The first CORA Open House was open for walkers and their families during the event. Volunteers were available onsite to provide information and answer questions.



*Starting line at the Hunger Walk 2016.*



*Emily, Donna, and Carol are volunteer Bakers for Empty Bowls.*

# KEY STATISTICS 2016

- 89% of donations go directly for food purchase.
- Food costs went down from 87 cents per pound to 83 cents per pound by the end of the year. A growing donation pool has helped lower the food costs.
- Purchasing food in bulk resulted in a continued reduction of costs.
- Volunteers worked more than 4,000 hours.
- In January alone, CORA saw 475 individuals served, 87% of whom were referred by The Department of Social Services.
- In the fiscal year there were 968 family visits and 19,068 individuals served, representing 12% of Chatham County residents.

## 2017 Highlights



*Linda Todd, 2017-2019,  
President, Board of Directors.*

Linda Todd joined CORA as Board President on July 1, 2017. During her early time as President of CORA, Linda worked on installing a corporate structure for CORA's organization. She also oversaw the search and eventual hiring of a new Executive Director and Director of Development.

In anticipation of a new building for CORA, Linda established a new Building Advisory Committee. And shortly after, they started a Capital Campaign to fund the outfitting of the new building, eventually raising over \$169,000.



*Travus Viera.*

There were several staff changes this year. Natalie Stewart was hired as Operations Manager on February 2, 2017. Travus Viera was hired as Transportation and Warehouse Specialist on October 1, 2017.

In May 2017, Linda planned a staff and board retreat that resulted in adopting the recommendations from the Villanova Report. This produced a new dynamic strategic plan for CORA which resulted in all goals for the five-year plan being met or exceeded within three years.



# The Villanova Report

John Tarascio requested a meeting with Beth Budd to discuss his thesis for his Business Master's degree. He needed to partner with a nonprofit company to observe and analyze the organization's workings. John was part of a study group, each of whom performed the same function for other organizations. When they were finished, they met to determine which of their organizations should be chosen for the group to continue to investigate. CORA was the nonprofit they chose.

A retreat to discuss The Villanova Study was held at the Governors Club with the board and senior staff members in attendance. Executive Service Corps facilitated the retreat.

These are a few of the major findings and suggestions for specific changes from The Villanova Study:



- At the time of the report, there was an approximate 14% poverty rate among Chatham County residents.
- Suggestions were made to eliminate the referral process from DSS to reach a broader proportion of these residents.
- It was found that CORA needed a larger facility to meet the increasing demand and more staff with versatility and expertise to help build a stronger and more lasting culture.
- As CORA experiences a period of growth, it opens new opportunities to expand its reach and broaden its network with various organizations.
- Enhanced marketing strategies will help develop new fundraising sources and build and boost public awareness through community outreach.
- Improving and rebuilding CORA's digital presence will drive both donor and volunteer growth.
- By tasking the Development Director with finding new grants and outreach opportunities, CORA can develop new relationships within the community.

## Programs and Events

SNACK! had 1,150 participants.

PORCH increased to 12 communities which collected 64,106 pounds of food for CORA.

The Hunger Walk was again a key event, which raised \$31,432. For the second year in a row, an Open House was held for walkers and their families at the Pantry.

Empty Bowls was held in the large Ballroom at Galloway Ridge in Ferrington Village for the first time. Over 200 people attended, and \$14,260 was raised. There were 23 potters from Chatham County and beyond, each contributing pottery bowls, and restaurants from the area served up several gallons each of delicious soup. Homemade bread, appetizers, and delicious desserts were provided by volunteers, along with a cash bar.

# KEY STATISTICS 2017

- The installation of a corporate structure to the organization.
- A Go Fund Me Campaign raised \$40,581 to buy a truck for food pick up, distribution, and use for off-site events. The truck was purchased in November of 2017.
- The first investment account was set up at Edward Jones for the reserve funds.

## 2018 Highlights

After nine years of dedicated service to CORA as Executive Director, Beth Budd retired. CORA hired a new Director, Melissa Driver Beard. In her first CORA newsletter, Melissa shared that she had worked in the nonprofit sector for 25 years, focusing on health and education-related issues locally, nationally, and internationally. Melissa also expressed her delight to “have this opportunity to apply the lessons I have learned within a nonprofit that provides essential benefits to the people of Chatham County.”

Other new staff hired this year were: Nathan Maltais as our first paid Volunteer Coordinator and Rebecca Hankins as Development and Communications Director. Rebecca quickly utilized her skills and experience to positively impact CORA.

A groundbreaking ceremony for CORA's new building was held on November 27, 2018, and although it was a cold and windy day, several leading figures in Chatham County and many CORA supporters attended.



*Melissa Driver Beard, Executive Director*



*CORA Groundbreaking, October 2018, Linda Todd, Jim Farrington, Diana Hales, County Commissioner and Hilary Murray. (L-R)*

# Programs and Events

CORA distributed more than 300,000 pounds of food for ten breakfasts, ten lunches, and healthy snacks every other week from mid-June to mid-August in 2017. SNACK! ensures children across Chatham County go to bed with full bellies. SNACK (Summer Nutritional Assistance for Chatham Kids) served more than 1,100 children in Chatham County in 2017. This vital program helps meet the needs of low-income children and their families in Chatham County who face hunger in the summer by providing nutritious meals and snacks when school is not in session.

CORA works together with many communities in Chatham County to meet the needs of our most vulnerable neighbors. PORCH Chatham is an all-volunteer effort to collect food and cash donations through monthly neighborhood food drives. In 2018 there were fifteen PORCH neighborhoods. CORA is so thankful to the following neighborhoods who donated more than 78,100 pounds of food to CORA: Bingham Ridge, Briar Chapel, Bynum, Carolina Preserve, Chatham Forest, Farrington Village, Governors Club, Highland Forest, Miles Branch, Potterstone Village, Powell Place, The Preserve at Jordan Lake, Redbud, River Forest, and Westfall.

The first ACC vs. Big 10 Golf Challenge was held in October 2018 at Governors Club. 142 golfers participated and raised \$45,000 gross income for CORA.

In 2018, CORA had its first campaign for Sustainers. This monthly giving program provides an easy way for people who want to help CORA year-round with monthly donations through their credit or debit card. This is yet another way to ensure a lasting impact on those struggling with hunger in our community.



*Staff and volunteers getting ready for SNACK!*



*Volunteers sorting after a large PORCH drop off.*



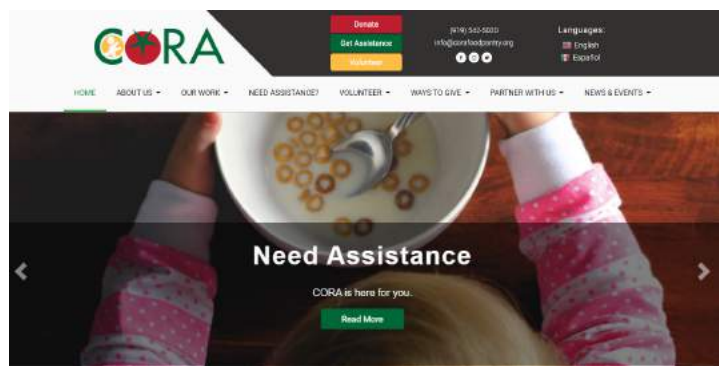
*Townhall Burger serving lunch at the golf tournament.*

# KEY STATISTICS 2018

Chatham Outreach Alliance (CORA) has become a place where the community comes together to help ensure that none of its neighbors go hungry. Thanks to the vision, generosity, and hard work of hundreds of individuals, businesses, churches, and organizations, CORA continues to be a thriving organization. We significantly impacted the community from July 1, 2017, to June 30, 2018. Check out what we accomplished.



- CORA rebranded its logo, website, and brand voice to better reflect who we are and our work in the community.
- In 2018, CORA Food Pantry engaged 316 volunteers who gave 9,292 hours of service.
- CORA provided Chatham County residents with 503,500 meals, distributed 607,628 pounds of food, served 23,620 people. In 2018, more than 2,400 Chatham County households received assistance.
- CORA expanded a print newsletter distributed semi-annually to a monthly electronic newsletter.
- The online donation platform was upgraded, and over \$112,000 was raised.
- Funding in 2018 came from Individual Donations (60%), Grants (22%), Events (12%), and Government (6%). We raised \$628,216 this year.



New website.



Welcome to CORA's first eNewsletter.

*We look forward to communicating with you on a regular basis so we can share with you the stories of CORA and keep you informed on all our programs and events.*

Innagural e-newsletter.



# 2019 Highlights

In 2019, we at CORA were incredibly proud of our accomplishments during the past year. Together, we made a difference in the lives of nearly 11,000 people experiencing hunger by providing nearly 1,000,000 meals. We strengthened our reach 17% over the prior year and began to look ahead at new opportunities to reach even more families in Chatham County.



*Reggie Blue.*

We piloted programs that enabled us to reach further into the community via mobile pantry service, extending hours to those who might like to visit CORA on Saturdays and providing additional food offerings to those families who needed to visit CORA just a few more times each year.



*Liz Gonzales.*

CORA's family increased when Reggie Blue joined the staff as Inventory and Logistics Specialist after working as a volunteer. Isabella DeSantis joined as the Volunteer Coordinator, Liz Gonzales as Pantry Manager, and Shannon Carter as Bookkeeper.

We launched our Capital Campaign - A Campaign to Help CORA Meet the Increasing Need. The cornerstone of this campaign is our 2,800 square foot warehouse and food pantry. While the county generously donated both the land and the building, CORA needed to raise \$150,000 to upfit the facility to best accommodate the needs of our clients, community partners, and staff. We are happy to announce that we quickly reached this goal!

## Programs and Events

CORA is more than just a food pantry; it is a place where the community comes together to help those most vulnerable and provide support. One unique way we do this is through our partnership with Book Harvest through their Community Book Bank Program. The goal of our Community Book Bank is to provide access to books for children and families in communities that have historically lacked books for their children.

SNACK! (Summer Nutritional Assistance for Chatham Kids) CORA's summer program distributes food to Chatham County children who typically receive subsidized meals at school during the academic year. In 2019, we served nearly 1,463 children in need. When families receive food through SNACK! it means that they have more money for housing, healthcare, education, childcare, transportation to work, and other resources that improve quality of life and opportunity.

In October 2019, CORA launched a Mobile Market in Siler City in partnership with Chatham Hospital. Food was displayed like a small grocery store, and families chose from various nutritious food options to meet their personal dietary needs. Each person received enough food for twenty-one meals at each visit. The first Mobile Market was held in Siler City at the UNC Hospital on October 15th, 2019.



PORCH participation continued to grow. This year we had 16 communities that donated 81,717 pounds of food.

In 2019, the second ACC vs. Big 10 Golf Tournament was held at Governors Club on October 21st, and net revenue was \$25,000.

On February 24th, 375 enthusiastic people gathered at Galloway Ridge for Empty Bowls. They purchased pottery from 32 potters, tasted delicious soups donated by 20 area restaurants (congratulations to Fearington House for their winning soup!), and lots of homemade bread and desserts provided by volunteers. \$21,000 was raised.

For several years, CORA volunteer and potter Ronni Theeman has coordinated the pottery donations for Empty Bowls. She is pictured below.



*Mobile Market in Siler City.*



*Fearington Village delivering  
PORCH.*



*Ronni Theeman at Empty Bowls.*

## KEY STATISTICS 2019

- 935,661 meals were distributed.
- 10,660 people served through the Pantry.
- 84 cents per dollar went directly to Programs.
- 5,970 gallons of milk were distributed.
- 1,037,456 pounds of food was distributed (nearly half was donated from farms, grocery stores, and food drives).
- 300 Volunteers contributed 9,833 hours of service.

# 2020 Highlights



*Meredith Katibah.*



*Mackie Hunter.*



*Kristine Ashwood.*

During this year of change, growth, challenges, and accomplishments, the certitude of the words "CORA feeds" people kept us focused.

It was an extraordinary year. Pre-pandemic, during the early months of the fiscal year, our supporters helped CORA meet a sudden and dramatic increase in demand for our services. We expanded service in Siler City through our Mobile Market and in the northeastern part of the county by partnering with the Take & Eat Food Pantry. CORA built these types of relationships throughout the county with clients, organizations, and other community members so we can all collaborate to meet the entire county's needs better.



*Outdoor service during COVID.*

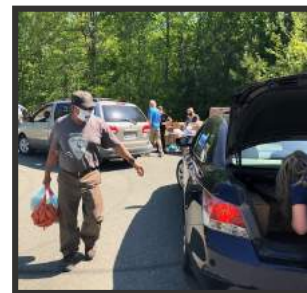
In the spring, CORA was blindsided by COVID-19. The strength of our conviction that nobody should go hungry was tested in unimaginable ways. At times, food simply could not be purchased in bulk. The entire community came to CORA's aid to ensure that the most vulnerable among us would be fed. The relentlessness of hunger during this pandemic was met with resilience, kindness, hope, and FOOD! We are grateful for the commitment to CORA and eliminating the need in our community. We look forward to returning to some new version of business-as-usual in a post-pandemic world, and we know there is still much to reflect upon going forward.

Staff changes included Meredith Katibah, joining CORA first as the SNACK! Intern and then as the full-time Community Support Manager. Former volunteer Mackie Hunter was hired as the Pantry Manager, and Kristine Ashwood as Contractual Project Manager. Kristine would eventually become the full-time Operations and Project Manager in 2021.

A meeting was held with the Executive Director's Advisory Board to brainstorm ideas for bringing volunteers safely back into the Pantry. First, a report was needed to look at the building objectively and design a floor plan and procedures to improve the workspaces and make it easier and safer for all to work there. A method for safety measures was developed, along with enhanced hygiene procedures to ensure a virus-free environment. A team of four longtime and experienced volunteers (Hilary Murray, Diana Rosenbaum, Pam Somers, Kate West) worked on this report and submitted it to the staff and the Board. Most of the suggestions were gradually implemented, and volunteers started to trickle back in.

# Programs and Events

In collaboration with Chatham Hospital, our new Mobile Market initiative served over 65,000 meals in its first year. This program was crucial to expanding healthy food access for all in our community, especially in the food deserts in the west and the most rural areas of the county. CORA also partnered with Bonlee Baptist Church to help feed people in their community. CORA provided food to the church to be distributed to those in need two times a month. Each month, the church served over 500 individuals.



*Loading cars at Mobile Market.*

In October 2020, Hunger Heroes was launched as a food drive twice a year, along with a Thanksgiving Turkey Drive. Twenty-six businesses participated with food bins at each location, and 5,483 pounds of food were collected.

Our PORCH Program continued to grow, with 18 participating communities donating 89,254 pounds of food.

SNACK! saw 1,504 children receiving food during this challenging year.

Carolina Meadows raised more than \$81,000 in support of the Pantry and CORA's other important programs. More than \$59,000 was raised from 230 donors through their annual spring fundraising drive.



*Thank you Carolina Meadows.*

Although our environment changed dramatically, volunteers remained the heart of this organization. In 2020, more than 300 CORA volunteers generously contributed 6,613 hours of their time – equivalent to three full-time staff.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, we relied on nearly 30 volunteers a day to help us meet the needs of our families. The pandemic posed various challenges and volunteers remained critical in helping us to pivot our services to curbside delivery. Volunteers took on a new role of packing bags full of food for distribution and continued to help in many other ways. These duties included sorting, stocking, client intake, client services, and ensuring food did not go to waste through our Retail Recovery program.



*Volunteers packing food.*

The true strength of our community lays in our ability to come together and care for each other, especially in times of need and uncertainty. At CORA, we were in awe of this community's unwavering dedication to the compassionate care of others. CORA is focused on continuing to build partnerships across Chatham County to ensure that all families facing food insecurity do not go hungry.



*Thank you to our amazing community.*

# KEY STATISTICS 2020

- 57,530 people served (50% more than previous year; 700 new families)
- 1.3 million meals distributed (enough food to feed all of Chatham County for 2 weeks)
- 28% served were children
- 642,000 pounds of food distributed
- 3,471 individuals served at the Mobile Market

## 2021 Highlights

At CORA, we love a challenge! We embraced a collaborative spirit and a "say yes" attitude. Throughout 2020-2021, CORA's board, volunteers, and staff faced challenges and changes with humor, creativity, and positivity. We met an increasing need by continuing to do more, offer more, and serve more, at the Pantry, at multiple mobile markets, via the SNACK! program, and through a wide variety of outreach and partnership efforts.

This positive attitude served us well and allowed us to recognize and take advantage of opportunities to serve the community better. In 2021, the CORA staff welcomed Van Johnson as the new Pantry Assistant.

## Programs and Events

Due to severe constraints in the food supply chain resulting from COVID-19, the food offered through the program was a bit different. Thanks to a collaboration with the Food Bank of Central and Eastern North Carolina and USDA, CORA offered children participating in SNACK! substantial portions of fresh produce in addition to shelf-stable foods.

This summer definitely threw CORA some hardballs, but with the help of volunteers, community groups, partners, and our fantastic staff, SNACK! was a success. We distributed food curbside in pre-packed boxes. Volunteers packed the boxes at Chatham Mills. When all was said and done, volunteers packed over 3,800 boxes weighing more than 107,000 pounds. The challenges presented by COVID-19 just reaffirmed that CORA has tremendous and unwavering support in our community, helping us adapt quickly to serve our families.



*Volunteers helping with SNACK!*



For the first time in our memories, we had enough funding to purchase food, but there was little food to be found! This was especially true for the SNACK! Program. We weren't derailed, though, and with a bit of ingenuity came up with some new ideas. Thankfully, Hilary Murray and Pam Somers willingly led a team of eager "personal shoppers" who shopped online and in grocery stores to gather the necessary staples and provide food for 1,144 children enrolled in CORA's SNACK! program.

At CORA we have always felt that reaching the people we serve within their communities is critically important. Localized service not only helps to build trust but also addresses transportation issues. Transportation was an enormous barrier to service for many people who live in Chatham County. CORA's Mobile Markets have enabled us to remove that barrier for many people during 2021.

Since launching our first Mobile Market in October of 2019, CORA has provided nearly 200,000 meals to families that find coming to CORA a challenge. In spring 2021, we expanded the Mobile Market from once to twice each month. CORA now hosts a Mobile Market in Siler City and a new Mobile Market at Nature Trail, a mobile home community in Chatham County. Families receive a variety of groceries at each market, including local fresh produce, meats, dairy, bakery items, and shelf-stable grocery staples.

PORCH Chatham is one chapter of many across the United States and represents 21 neighborhoods. In fiscal year 2021, PORCH collected 107,617 pounds of food and \$107,114 to support our work.

**"PORCH Communities is so appreciative for our partnership with CORA. It is the perfect embodiment of neighbors coming together to help those in their communities that need help. For over 10 years, PORCH and CORA have worked together, and the partnership has grown from one neighborhood in the early years to 21 neighborhoods coming together to collect and deliver to CORA. As PORCH Community continues to grow across the US, our CORA pantry partnership model has become the benchmark for successful community hunger relief partnerships." Christine Cotton, Founder/Board Chair, PORCH Communities.**

In 2021, there were 100 active volunteers per month, with 12-20 new volunteers being trained monthly. Our numbers continued to grow!



*CORA Staff taking a break from SNACK!*



*Packing cars with food at Mobile Market.*



*Holiday celebration at PORCH Briar Chapel.*



*Volunteers from UNC packing produce.*

# KEY STATISTICS 2021

- 1,178,326 pounds of food were distributed.
- 301,244 pounds of fresh produce was served.
- \$1.3 million in financial support.
- 866,000 pounds of food donated.
- 6,310 Volunteer hours and 176 new volunteers trained.

## COMMUNITY SUPPORT IN 2021

Many community groups, businesses, churches, restaurants, farmers, and individuals gave food and grocery products to help more than 60,300 people in the fiscal year 2021. Listed below are a few of the people and organizations who made a real difference in the lives of others and are committed partners in building a community without hunger.

Lil Rooster Farm is located on twenty acres in Pittsboro and grows six varieties of local greens, including, but not limited to, Green Butter, Red Oak Leaf, and Lolla Rosa. These beautiful greens are grown in hydroponic greenhouses and provide year-round produce to the families we serve. CORA was grateful for Lil Rooster Farm's belief that addressing hunger requires a community to come together to help those in need. Lil Rooster Farm donates 10% of the lettuce they grow, and CORA received 1,455 pounds of greens in 2021. "Sharing our fresh produce is a small way we can help address hunger in Chatham County." – Jim Rigney, Owner, Lil Rooster Farm.

Robin Hood's Kitchen began as a new organization in our community working to create a sustainable food culture. Local farmers, chefs, and businesses came together to produce delicious, ready-to-eat meals from local, freshly sourced vegetables for people facing food insecurity. Thanks to weekly deliveries from Robin Hood's Kitchen, CORA provided 2,300 more meals for our families – all made from healthy ingredients. CORA received 2,834 pounds of healthy meals between January and June, including frittatas, soup, rice bowls, succotash, and muffins.



Friends of CORA Garden is a community garden located in Pittsboro at the home of long-time CORA volunteer Carol Newnam. In March of 2013, a group of volunteers organized to form the garden to help provide locally sourced, nutritious produce to those facing hunger. The garden has been growing strong ever since. The garden produced over 1,133 pounds of produce for our families in 2021, including green beans, squash, cucumbers, and beautiful wildflowers.



Good Hope Farm is a proud new CORA supporter with a long history. It has been part of a thriving agricultural community in Cary, NC, for over 100 years. Today, it provides land access to a new generation of farmers who bring local food to the community. We are grateful they are willing to share their abundance with CORA.



United Way and Chatham County have been steadfast and generous supporters over the years. In FY 2021, combined, they donated \$76,000.

CORA is currently partnering with the Freedom Family Church to ensure they have groceries to give to those facing food insecurity in Siler City on Saturdays. We are also working with Freedom Family Church and the Salvation Army to provide food and basic hygiene supplies to the homeless population - serving about 50 individuals each month in the area facing hunger and homelessness.



Recently, we provided the Siler City Police Department with bags of groceries in a joint effort to accomplish several goals: provide those in need with food and provide local officers with an easy way to do something positive for those they serve. "As a public safety organization, the opportunity to expand our services in our community is beneficial," stated Mike Wagner, Siler City Chief of Police and CORA Board member.



CORA collaborated with Chatham Transit, the Chatham County Council on Aging, and Piedmont Health to ensure CSFP (Commodity Supplemental Food Program) "senior boxed," full of a variety of food staples, reached our mutual clients via home delivery.

Chatham Trades has helped tremendously with SNACK! this spring, by packing boxes of nutritious food to be distributed to children facing hunger and managing delivery. Chatham Trades has also generously offered food storage space in their warehouse when our building could no longer house inventory.





# CORA'S NEW BUILDING



Several years ago, when Jim Farrington and Beth Budd asked the Chatham County Board of Commissioners for funding for a new building, many people thought the idea was too bold. Today, we realize these bold ideas were exactly what was needed. Sometimes they turn into very real buildings! Work began on the new facility in February 2021, and since then, it has come together quickly. The new 2,800 square foot building will serve as both a food storage warehouse and Pantry and will allow CORA to streamline operations and more effectively provide food to those facing hunger. The relocation of the Pantry will also enable CORA to repurpose our current space to include meeting, educational, and food preparation space, all of which will better serve the community.

We wish to thank the Chatham County Board of Commissioners and all our donors for helping to make this fantastic endeavor possible. We hope to open the new space in 2022.

CORA is excited to get back to “choice” shopping. The Pantry will be set up like a grocery store in the new building, allowing community members to choose the food that best matches their preferences and needs. CORA believes that when families select their food, it creates an atmosphere of dignity and builds a sense of community between staff, volunteers, and those we serve. Shoppers will be asked to take only what they need and to be considerate of their fellow neighbors in need. We will continue to offer pre-packed groceries, in a Grab-and-Go system, for those who may not have enough time to shop. We also hope to launch an online app that will enable guests to choose groceries online or through an app for pick up in the Pantry.

As CORA focuses on bolstering our offerings of nutrient-rich foods, we will work more closely with local farmers to provide fresh produce and local protein.





Building our local food economy means supporting grassroots farmers who contribute to improved food access and food security. Soon, we plan to offer micro-loans to local food entrepreneurs whose business goals complement CORA's mission and values.

At CORA, we believe information is powerful. Upon completing the new building, we plan to focus on providing additional resources to our families. Transportation is a limiting factor in Chatham County, and helping a neighbor maximize their time is very important. When families come to CORA to shop, we also connect them to the services they need. Each month, CORA hopes to offer a wide range of programming aimed at helping individuals build capacity to change their lives. Examples include nutrition classes, cooking classes, and even gardening classes.

*Together We Will Build a Community Without Hunger*



# FINAL WORDS FROM THE BOARD PRESIDENT

John Tarascio has agreed to stay on as President as of June 2022 (with the help and support of Linda Todd). He discussed the original Villanova report, which was his introduction to CORA and he agrees that the response to this report has been much better than he expected. He credits this success to the remarkable leadership of the organization and the improved communication and respect given to all staff and volunteers. The entire team is a happy, responsive, and cohesive group.



*John Tarascio, Board President*

This team went through the most challenging year of CORA's existence and met the challenges with great energy and creativity. Not only with meeting the community's food needs, but improving processes and bringing an impressive amount of financial support and significantly increased food donations. This generosity saved the day when the food bank was struggling to provide food regularly.

John stressed that the Board needs to be hands-on, shifting and encouraging them to be more liberated and creative. While focusing on strategy, the board also needs to keep to the core mission. This includes improving the food that is distributed to include more meat and other protein.

When asked about challenges, John mentioned the importance of maintaining the team's momentum and keeping the team intact. He is looking at the changing demographics in Chatham County and the impact on our operation. For future growth, he looks forward to purchasing a refrigerated truck that will enable more offsite delivery. He is also looking at other cost-effective solutions. One initiative he mentioned is with the Siler City police force, who now can give food from CORA to any needy families they come across in their duties.

The CORA staff enjoyed a well-deserved holiday lunch and lots of good cheer at the end of an extraordinary year.

*Cheers to 2022!*



# KEY STATISTICS 2022

- 1.1 million meals distributed.
- 316,026 pounds of fresh produce was served.
- \$1.1 million in financial support.
- 755,721 pounds of food donated.
- 9,242 Volunteer hours and 268 volunteers.

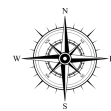
## NEW STRATEGIC PLAN

### Our 2022-2025 Strategic Plan Guidance for the Future

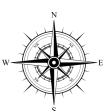
In 2021, CORA completed a three-year strategic plan, and we are happy to report that the fruits of that labor were abundant. Over three years, we grew the staff, launched the Mobile Market, increased revenue, served more people, worked to intimately understand the needs of our community on a local level, and debuted a new website, logo, and newsletter.

We're excited to share the 2022 strategic plan. It results from a thorough planning process that was heavily impacted by the previous two years' events. As the Coronavirus spread, the economy faltered, and inflation rose, the demand for food assistance saw a corresponding increase. CORA responded by increasing food distribution to record levels across Chatham County. Over three years, we distributed 3.4 million meals. At the same time, our supporters – individuals, businesses, foundations, neighborhoods, and community groups – generously responded to our request for assistance. Collectively, we came together to build a community without hunger.

Our new plan is divided into five strategic priority areas, representing the core areas of our focus and investment. Each outcome is designed to serve our program participants best, and our overall success will be achieved by delivering results in close collaboration with our partners across Chatham.



## PRIORITIES



### Geographically Expand

- Reduce gaps in food access across the county will enable CORA to assist more individuals facing food insecurity.

### Build Capacity

- Source, develop, and manage resources to increase our ability to reach more individuals facing food insecurity and improve how we receive, store, and distribute food.

### Expand Programs

- Expand and improve services to ensure that people facing hunger in our community have reliable access to abundant and nutritious food.

### Diversify Leadership

- Boost diversity within our organization to allow CORA to strengthen its effectiveness by introducing new viewpoints via life experiences that enrich programs, widen the organization's reach, and engage new partners.

### Increase Revenue

- Cultivate donors and provide meaningful and inventive ways to attract and retain supporters to help us meet strategic priorities to build a community without hunger.



# COMMUNITY SUPPORT IN 2021

**Kiwanis Pittsboro** is ever-present at CORA by providing volunteers for the Mobile Market in Siler City, hosting a SNACK! distribution site, delivering weekly Panera donations, and making financial donations to support our work.



Breaking bread at CORA is much tastier thanks to our partnership with **Great Harvest Bread Company**. From whole wheat to anadama, their weekly donations totaled over 1,000 pounds of scratch-made bread to the Pantry this past year.

CORA received its first grant from the **NC GlaxoSmithKline Foundation** through their Ribbon of Hope program. They awarded CORA \$25,000 to expand our Mobile Market and to help us meet the need where it is in Chatham County.

**The United Way** envisions a community where all residents can access the necessary resources to thrive. We are thankful for their continued partnership in our work and appreciate their \$40,000 donation for the Pantry and SNACK!

The **Galloway Ridge Charitable Fund** awarded \$65,000 in community grants to 13 Chatham County organizations in 2022. CORA is a grateful recipient of \$7,000 to help us feed families across the county.



**Screech Owl Greenhouses** began donating to CORA in 2020. This year, Screech has donated over 1,500 pounds of fresh, hydroponically-grown produce to the Pantry. In addition, we now also purchase a variety of vegetables for our families.

**Chatham Mills** has partnered with CORA for many years and is a champion of our work in the community. Through their Round Up program, we received \$1,419 in donations. We also received over 1,900 pounds of donated food.



Through their Children's and Women's ministry, **Mt. Carmel Baptist Church** has shown a firm commitment to helping their neighbors in need through donations, food drives, and special projects for families.

**Women of Ferrington** works to serve the needs of women and children in Chatham County via their grant program. Since 2011, CORA has received \$48,600 in funds supporting SNACK!

**PORCH neighborhoods** collect food each month to donate to CORA. This year, 26 neighborhoods donated over 100,000 pounds of food and raised more than \$76,000!

We are thankful for our partnerships with the **Pittsboro and Ferrington Village Farmers' Markets**. Vendors from the markets donate produce for families, and market shoppers donate to CORA so that we can buy local produce for our families.



Many thanks to **Duke Health** for their \$10,000 Building Healthy Communities Goodwill grant assisting our Mobile Market!

## WHAT OUR NEIGHBORS ARE SAYING

Hunger is a cruel companion, affecting individuals of all ages and backgrounds without discrimination. Anyone can find themselves needing food assistance during their lifetime, and CORA will be there to answer the challenge of food insecurity and build a community without hunger.

"CORA means so much to me. The friendly faces let me know I will get the help that I need the moment I walk through the door. Thank to your help, I have been able to feed my family and keep my cabinets from staying empty."

"Thank you so much - now I can finally sleep tonight."

"Don't ever stop doing what you're doing. It brightens my day to come to the Pantry."





## MEETING HUNGER AND FAMILIES WHERE THEY ARE

At CORA, we feel that reaching the people we serve within their own communities is critically important. Localized service builds trust, new partnerships, and addresses transportation challenges. CORA is committed to addressing hunger and food insecurity at the local level while establishing new partnerships across Chatham County to ensure everyone has access to safe and nutritious food. check out what we accomplished is 2022.

### Feeding Children

Since 2009, SNACK!'s has increased the accessibility of nutritious food to hungry Chatham County children during the summer. In summer 2021, we served 1,106 children with more than 136,000 meals. The pandemic continued to affect how we served the community. We had ten distribution sites across the county and supplied food curbside in prepacked boxes. With the help of many volunteers, we loaded cars with 3,239 shelf-stable food boxes and 3,700 produce boxes, weighing in at 153,024 pounds.

### Equitable Access

CORA's Mobile Market also provides nutritious food to neighbors facing food insecurity in Chatham County. This program helps us reach those in need of food far beyond the boundaries of our Pantry location in Pittsboro. Approximately 75% of those we serve do not live in or near Pittsboro, and lower-income areas in western Chatham County are home to several food deserts. Similar to the Pantry, families stay in their cars, and prepacked groceries are placed in their vehicles. There are various options, including fresh produce, meats, dairy, bakery items, and shelf-stable staples. We host a Mobile Market in Siler City and Nature Trail in Chapel Hill each month. In 2022, we served 9,700 individuals over 200,000 meals.

### Expansion

In 2022 CORA opened a satellite pantry in Siler City in partnership with Love Chatham. Love Chatham is a non-profit organization established to serve and love those in our community suffering from homelessness and hunger. We are working closely with their leadership team to ensure they have the tools, food, and support needed to permanently expand CORA's services into Siler City. CORA in Siler City is open on the first and third Saturday each month from 10 am - 1 pm at Freedom Family Church at 421 N. Holly Avenue.

### Serving Seniors

In spring 2022, CORA also launched our delivery program for low-income seniors on fixed incomes who may struggle with housing, health care, and other costs. Often, seniors are homebound or lack transportation. This program delivers federal CSFP boxes and additional nutritious groceries, including high-protein items, canned soups, pasta, cereal, eggs, bread, and produce, to seniors monthly.



# KEY STATISTICS 2023

- 1.28 million meals distributed.
- 236,666 pounds of fresh produce was served.
- \$1.87 million in financial support.
- 740,838 pounds of food donated.
- 12,132 Volunteer hours and 280 volunteers.

## Highlighting Our Partners 2023

### Chatham Community Church

Chatham Community Church embodies loving one's neighbors and addressing their needs within the community. CORA wholeheartedly shares this philosophy and has established a strong partnership with the church dedicated to serving Chatham County. The church has been an incredible partner throughout the years, organizing food drives, assembling hygiene bags, supplying volunteers, providing financial support, and hosting important meetings. Chatham Community Church has been a steadfast ally, standing beside us in our mission to assist individuals facing food insecurity.

"We are glad to partner with organizations in the community who are doing outstanding work--CORA being on the top of the list when it comes to helping to deal with food insecurity," shared Alex Kirk, Lead Pastor. "We love how CORA is both practical and creative, finding ways to meet needs that dignify the recipient. CORA is thoughtfully run and is a great gift to Chatham County." CORA is excited to continue working alongside this fantastic organization as we find creative and innovative solutions to hunger across Chatham.

### Chatham Trades

CORA has had the pleasure of partnering with Chatham Trades for several years, and they have been an essential part of our operations. The use of their warehouse space was crucial during our transition to the new building, as they kindly received and stored pallets of food for our various programs. Chatham Trades' consumers skillfully pack food boxes for our Mobile Markets and SNACK! initiatives, enabling us to serve countless hungry individuals throughout the county. They also have been critical partners in helping us meet the increased need and assisting with food delivery to many of our SNACK! distributions sites. "Chatham Trades is proud to partner with CORA to give back to the community. The assembly and packaging of food boxes for their programs has provided skill training and employment for persons with intellectual developmental disabilities," shared Shawn Poe, Executive Director.

Partnerships like the one we have with Chatham Trades are crucial in tackling food insecurity and ensuring people have access to nutritious food. Their willingness to collaborate and provide essential services has, no doubt, had a positive impact on those we serve.





At CORA, we believe that dependable, equitable access to safe and nutritious food is a fundamental human right. We also believe that food is more than a basic need. Food provides so much more than just nourishment; it is a way for people to connect. This holds true in Chatham County – where food connects us to family, celebrates our different cultures, and is essential to a thriving community. Over the past five years, we have grown tremendously and now offer various programs to assist our neighbors.

Recently, we reopened CORA with a new choice shopping pantry, warehouse, and community space. The new facility spans over 4,000 square feet and allows us to efficiently, safely, and compassionately meet the demand for food in our community. Our new choice pantry is set up like a grocery store, and community members can select the food that matches their preferences and needs. This creates an atmosphere of dignity and builds a sense of community between staff, volunteers, and those we serve.

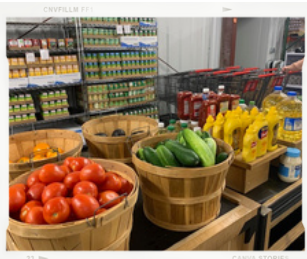
CORA has expanded our pantry services by providing monthly deliveries to home-bound seniors, our most vulnerable population. We provide extra food monthly to income-eligible individuals through a partnership with the Food Bank of Central and Eastern North Carolina and the United States Department of Agriculture’s TEFAP and CSFP programs, serving approximately 1,150 people monthly.

In 2023, CORA established a satellite pantry in Siler City in partnership with Love Chatham, a non-profit organization established to serve those in our community facing homelessness and hunger. We are working closely with their leadership team to ensure they have the tools, food, and support needed to expand CORA’s services into Siler City.

CORA's Mobile Market delivers nutritious food to people facing food insecurity beyond our pantry in Pittsboro. We hold monthly Mobile Markets in Siler City and Chapel Hill and occasional markets in other areas meeting the need where it is. Since 2019, this program has provided 28,000 individuals with over 500,000 meals.

Our SNACK! program provides food to children who depend on free or reduced-cost meals at school but face a lack of proper nutrition when school is not in session. In Chatham County, approximately 50% of public school children receive free or low-cost meals through the federal school lunch program because their family income is at or near the poverty level. Last summer, we served 1,327 children with more than 186,000 pounds of food. We also provide food on weekends and during school breaks from September through June with CORApacks, where each child receives a monthly food box containing three meals and two snacks daily for when they are not in school. We hope to serve 150 students through the CORApacks program in the upcoming school year.

Research shows that access to nutritious food is the key to a healthy community where children do well in school, families thrive, and seniors do not face the stress of choosing between food and other necessities. Last year, CORA served 10,220 individuals 1.28 million meals through our various programs.



# Lobby and Children's Space

**RENOVATIONS  
ALMOST  
COMPLETED**



In 2023, work on the administrative offices and lobby was nearly complete. The job entailed removing some walls, updating bathrooms, creating a larger kitchen and a new breakroom, expanding offices, an updated conference room, a larger lobby for families, a fun space for children, and even a technology bar for our community members to access the internet. We hoped to be ready for a grand re-opening in July!

## 2023 EVENTS

### Turkey Tuesday

What an amazing Turkey Tuesday we had. Thanks to Food Lion, Chatham County Democratic Party, volunteers, and community members who made this year the most successful ever! We collected 2,472 lbs of food, including 187 turkeys and 10 hams! This is a fantastic and much-needed success, as CORA has served 277 families just three days after the event. We are so lucky to have our community and the support of many.



### Empty Bowls

Together, we raised \$29,000 directly impacting our efforts to build a community without hunger across Chatham County.

With 325 guests in attendance, 40 dedicated volunteers, over 40 talented potters, and the participation of 12 remarkable restaurants, 41 talented dessert makers, eight skilled bread makers, and nine generous appetizer donors, Empty Bowls truly embodied the spirit of community collaboration. The evening raised vital funds and spread awareness about addressing hunger in our community. Thank you to all who participated!





# STAFF & VOLUNTEER STORIES

## *You All are Family*



For several months in 2019, CORA opened on Saturday mornings, Liz Gonzales; the Pantry Manager was working this day. One August morning, Liz was joking around with a young girl in the pantry who was barefooted, saying that soon school would start, and she'd have to wear her shoes again. The girl's mom started crying and said she didn't know how she would pay for shoes for her two girls. It was almost closing time, so Liz asked the mom to wait. Liz's three girls were with her at the pantry that day, and they asked the mom to go with them to the Dollar Store and a few other stores. Liz and her girls bought the children school supplies, toys, clothes, and shoes. This is an excellent example of how far CORA staff and volunteers are willing to help our clients.



Melissa recalls her concerns during the early months of the pandemic with all the food shortages; CORA never knew if there would be enough food for the next day...and yet from the USDA, local producers, and gardens, TFAP, and PORCH, there was always enough food. Because Travus and Reggie knew all the grocery stores and everyone at the Food Bank, she remembered how they could freely shop there for CORA. Keeping the Pantry open was indeed a community effort.



One day in late April 2020, CORA was nearly out of food. We had been serving hundreds of people each day and, based on those numbers; we're very concerned about how we would feed people the next day. The food chain was broken, food had been ordered in plenty of time, but deliveries were delayed. Even the grocery stores were limiting amounts to their customers. Travus and Reggie had little luck getting food from their usual sources but were willing to go out again, but it seemed pointless. Amazingly in the morning, food was there, on the doorstep. No one knew where it had come from, but there were no more terrible shortages after that day. We were eternally grateful.



Enrique Romero, a valued bi-lingual volunteer, started in the fall of 2020 at our Mobile Market in Siler City. Enrique travels to CORA every day via rides from his friends and family, Chatham Transit, and, if necessary, his trusted bike to help distribute food to families in our community. Since October 2020, he has contributed over 850 hours as a volunteer, and we are very thankful for his stories, positive energy, and innovative ideas.

COVID and Mackie, the Animal Hunter! When our processes changed to service clients outside the building, occasionally wildlife would make its way indoors. One afternoon a bird made its way inside and couldn't get out. All available staff gathered to help the poor creature. A comedy of errors ensued, with everyone screaming as it flew in their direction. Eventually, Mackie caught the bird as it flew into a box. Travus and Reggie bought a toy fishing net, and Mackie captured the terrified bird and led it to freedom. Travus informed the staff that he was a city boy and knew nothing about catching birds!



During the Pandemic, from 2020-2021, there was a groundswell of support from the community to help CORA. Rebecca recalled that people said, "what do you need?" and would drive by in their cars asking how they could help and then would show up a few hours later with whatever was needed. Previous funding and community campaigns had set the stage, so when COVID hit, over a million dollars was raised. Rebecca also remembers when one person hand-delivered a check for \$10,000.



There was a tremendous amount of staff cross-training that occurred during the Pandemic. Everyone pitched in, and there remains a fostering of teamwork. There is laughter in the team debriefs, and the staff has repeatedly said they feel like family. This has not gone unnoticed by the clients. One said, "You guys are our family."



# CLIENT TESTEMONIALS

## *Together We Are Stronger*



“Because of COVID -19 and the struggles my family is facing, we have three generations living under one roof. It’s nice having my entire family with me, but we would not be able to ends meet without my CORA family. Thank you for all your help, and God bless you.”  
Rhoda, Pittsboro.



“Please accept my grateful appreciation for the food I have received a few times from CORA. Almost every time I’ve visited, I have had nothing to eat in my home. Nothing at all! So, you can easily understand my urgent need and know that your volunteers, staff, and contributors have made a truly generous gift to my life and health.”  
Fran, Siler City.



“CORA means so much to me. The friendly faces let me know I will get the help I need the moment I walk through the door. Thanks to your help, I have been able to feed my family and keep my cabinets from being empty.”  
Linda, Pittsboro.



“CORA has been a lifeline for my family and extended family. When things are hard, we know we have the support from the community to see us through and help us with the most basic needs, healthy food. Thank you to the great staff and volunteers who make it happen.”  
Jerry, Moncure.



“Thank you so much for being there for my family when we are at our lowest. When I visit CORA, I feel cared for and like I’m with friends. We really appreciate all the food you supply, and my kids really enjoy the cakes and cupcakes; these are a rare and special treat for them.”  
Milly, Goldston.





# VOLUNTEERS

## *The Heart of CORA*



Volunteers are crucial to CORA's mission and work and the heartbeat of our community work. Ask any CORA volunteer, and they will quickly explain that what they receive from their time spent in the pantry halls is far more than the hours they give to the organization. At CORA, the old adage, "it's better to give than to receive," is at the core of our volunteer program.

CORA has a unique and diverse community of volunteers from young professionals to retirees, stay-at-home moms and dads, and their children, teenagers experiencing their first professional commitment, as well as current and former clients. Everyone who walks through our doors can sense and appreciate the overwhelming atmosphere of community, inclusiveness, and family. CORA is a place you want to be to help your neighbors. In fact, many of our staff began work at CORA as volunteers.

# *Thank You!*





# CLOSING THOUGHTS - HISTORY PROJECT

From Hilary Murray: "I can't believe I've worked in some capacity as a volunteer for CORA 14 years...and I'm more enthusiastic about the place now than I've ever been! The growth has been steady over the years and the opportunities for volunteer work have been many and varied. However, the last four years have been mind-boggling. The energy, enthusiasm, and skilled leadership team have fostered a truly remarkable team and together the team has achieved wonderful things. It is my pleasure to be a small part of this wave of extraordinary progress, and I am in awe of everyone connected to this unique organization."



Hilary Murray

From Pam Somers: "When I moved to NC in 2010, a new friend was a CORA volunteer and suggested I should look into volunteering there. I did just that and have loved being part of CORA ever since; have loved the families we work with, my fellow volunteers, all the worthwhile projects and events, and the most amazing and caring staff. Working with Hilary on this updated CORA History has also been the story of my history there. I've seen CORA grow and thrive, especially during the past two difficult years of the pandemic. CORA lives its mission every day. I'm proud and honored to be a part of such a loving and collaborative and passionate organization and can't wait to see what the future holds."



Pam Somers

