

STAR FISH FOOD PANTRY

Volume 8/Issue 2

October 2026



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Patricia Bixel
Executive Director



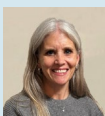
Michael Townley
Secretary



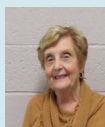
Kathleen Nitzsche
Treasurer



Sarah Mazzaresse
Statistician



Catherine Renga
Holiday Meals



Eelco Swaak
Logistics



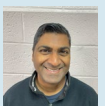
Jerry Zukowski
Food supply



Avril Lecky
Member



Jason Thomas
Member



Marie Pace, Ex Officio
Board Advisor

OUR MISSION To provide emergency food assistance to the people of Plainfield who find themselves in need.

55TH ANNIVERSARY VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION

We dedicate this newsletter to our many volunteers who make service to our Plainfield families possible.

Our Board of Directors are the leaders who work hand-in-hand with our volunteers every week. We have three teams set up, one on Tuesdays and two on Thursdays, alternating weeks.

While we refer to them as Team 1 and Team 2, the captain of Team 1 lovingly refers to themselves as the A-Team. All three teams are hard-working, fun-loving and valuable members of Star Fish, all "A+" to us.

Our regulars also work to prepare, deliver, and help distribute 40 to 60 food bags at the Plainfield Food Security Project on the second and fourth Thursdays every month. They also bring over surplus items that have been donated, like coats or gloves or other items. Two other members pick up dozens of eggs and deliver to PFSP on those two days a month.

Our food supply director handles most of the food pickups from the Community Food Bank of NJ in Hillside. Other volunteers pitch in on that task when needed. Two members go to Costco to buy chicken parts for our weekly food orders.

Then we have 25 to 35 volunteers who turnout for the Thanksgiving food delivery every year from Faith Lutheran Church in New Providence. Six to eight hundred pounds of food, collected in New Providence and delivered in a truckload on the Saturday after Thanksgiving, all sorted and stored on shelves or in our backroom for use during the year.

Read more about our volunteers and their service in this issue.

*We welcome your comments.
Contact us at
secretary@starfishplainfield.org*

55TH ANNIVERSARY VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION LUNCHEON

Comments by Pat Bixel, Executive Director, acknowledging volunteers at the luncheon.

Kathleen N: who is my right-hand pal. She has an unwavering commitment & support to Star Fish. This is a tough job being director of Star Fish. She's always there when I need her, she helps me tremendously. Kathleen's mom, Eileen Cuniff, started Star Fish along with a few good women 55 years ago. Kathleen's brother made a comment to her recently saying, "The volunteers have a state of grace I would like to obtain."

Michael & Janet T: When I started volunteering with Star Fish, I referred to Michael as the *big kahuna* of Star Fish. He and his wife Janet are long time volunteers. As board secretary, Michael keeps a calm demeanor when Kathleen and I are going bonkers. He writes personal and heartwarming acknowledgements to donors with the most beautiful penmanship of any kid who graduated from a Catholic school. Michael spends countless hours writing our newsletter, writing grant applications, and keeping our records. Janet is his cheerleader and his helper with regular pick up & delivery of dozens of fresh eggs from wholesale distributor as well as chicken from Costco.

Sarah M: Sarah has enviable skills with technology. She is our statistician and produces labels and greetings for each holiday food gift card for our families. She first keeps track of the agencies who produce the names for each family to make sure there are no duplicates and that every family gets the appropriate number of cards for their needs. This is a huge timesaver from the old method of writing all the label information on hundreds and hundreds of brown shopping bags.

Cathy R: Cathy is another initiator of Star Fish way back when. She is also referred to as our Holiday Girl because she leads the Holiday Gift Card Program. She has a heart of gold working for Star Fish, those at Delaney Hall, and Syrian refugees. Cathy lives the Gospel.

Avril L: A board member who contributes to Team Thursday. She's helpful in making us aware of issues in Plainfield and she's a take-charge person. She sees a place that needs a task to be completed, she recognizes the task to be completed, and Avril completes the task.

Gina C: Gina shows up every Tuesday with bags of cereal. Gina is our machine. She takes command of filling up those Plainfield Food Security Project bags. "Gina!!! The food has not expired! It's 'best used before'"

Bruce & Ruth R: Their incredible loyalty to Star Fish and their Wilson Memorial Church is priceless. They work every week on packing bags and bring with them food donated by the congregation. Wilson Memorial is an outstanding partner with Star Fish, donating up to \$5,000 each year between donations from the Outreach Committee and The Frippery Thrift Store. Recently, Ruth and Bruce became our delegates to Wagner Farms, picking up fruits and vegetables in season.

Conrad W: *Duo lingo* serves this man incredibly well. Our Spanish linguist each Tuesday does whatever is needed. We appreciate his time and talents and are so glad he joined our merry band of do-gooders.

Suzanne S, Sherry K, Joan M, Pat J: our team Thursday troupe. A fun-sharing, fun-loving group. Suzanne's dear husband Joe was on our board and unfortunately died a few years ago. May his memory be kept alive.

Karen C: Karen comes all the way from Gladstone, NJ. She shows up every Tuesday and Thursday handling the monthly stats numbers for the Community Food Bank of NJ. I'm so grateful for your taking hold of that necessary task.

Sharon & Jeff P: More recent volunteers, Sharon the Thursday packer, Jeff our luminary guy who now joins us as a carrier of the bags of food to the Plainfield Food Security Project location and to the counselors at Plainfield Cardinal Success Center.

Rich G: a true loyalist to Star Fish for many years. He makes up the best triple bags of any team member. He is an awesome guy who puts eggs into dozen cartons when we buy loose eggs in bulk. Rich also takes food each Tuesday to PAS. He shares the kindest words with our volunteers, always encouraging the teens who volunteer. He is just a really nice guy.

Jim N: A newer volunteer at Star Fish because he likes the vibe. And he knows which boxes are the good boxes! Welcome to Star Fish.

Pat B: She gave up her time volunteering at stables using horseback riding as therapy for disabled children to be with Star Fish on team Thursday. Thank you for your commitment to Star Fish.

Raquel W: "You need me, I'll be there, just text." Raquel appears either Tuesday or Thursday sharing with us words of wisdom on nutrition or emotions. We can use both.

Roger I: A long-time volunteer who stepped away recently, he is always welcome to come back to visit. Your stories about the food packages given to the troops, their expiration dates....they make Gina cringe!

Jim and Lois W: Jim and Lois were members of Star Fish for a very long time. Lois, we enjoyed your company and help in packing up bags with your Team Thursday friends. Jim's favorite part of volunteering was with food distribution and especially taking care of those individuals of the Park Hotel, a group to whom Jim showed the dignity they deserved when most likely others did not. He was their snack friend. We miss you and wish you were with us again.

Regular volunteers unable to attend:

Brenda Odom
Eelco Swaak
Bob Joseph
Diane and Lou Yannaco
Marie Pace
Kevin Doyle
Gary Molenaar
Jerry Zukowski
Jason Thomas



Volunteers listen as Pat Bixel compliments each in turn.

STAR FISH VOLUNTEERS' TESTIMONIALS ON OUR 55TH ANNIVERSARY

Volunteer

Why do you volunteer at Star Fish Food Pantry

Michael Townley

The hungry in Plainfield have an obvious need that I want to help alleviate, as an outgrowth of my Catholic faith, my many years as a member of the Rotary Club of the Plainfields, and as a way to show goodness and kindness to others.

Jason Thomas

I enjoy knowing that my time is well spent helping my neighbors, who I might not interact with. I feel more fulfilled volunteering at Star Fish than working in my professional capacity. It's a good feeling when our shelves are stocked to the ceiling.

Patty Bixel

Star Fish has grounded me in understanding the poverty and need for food in our town of Plainfield. Working with volunteers so dedicated in helping reduce hunger creates a family of truly good people whom I cherish and hold dear. My life is enriched by my work with Star Fish.

Rich Gewirtz

While knowing that this work directly helps nourish families has been deeply rewarding, what makes every week truly special is the camaraderie. Spending every Tuesday morning alongside such a dedicated, warm, and selfless group of fellow volunteers has been an absolute joy. I am profoundly grateful for the lifelong friendships made at Star Fish and for our shared mission.

Karen Colta

I have met so many good people. My life is enriched by the other volunteers and the clients, too.

Suzanne Stowasky

I joined Star Fish about 4 years ago to honor my husband, Joe. He was a Board member responsible for purchasing and ordering for a number of years. Unfortunately, he passed away in May, 2022.

Raquel Watson

Volunteering at Star Fish aligns with my faith. I declare war on poverty.

Pat Bernstein

I admire Star Fish's mission and the good work that everyone does to help folks in need.

Pat Jackson

I wanted to help people in need. Along with that I have made so many friends.

Avril Lecky

Working with committed and like-minded people for a necessary and important cause has been and is truly rewarding.

Cathy Renga

God has blessed me in so many ways that donating a few hours a week to Star Fish is a small way to thank Him. I was also one of the original creators of St Mary's Sunday Dinner Program that started 35 years ago, also in Plainfield.

Joan McAlary

I am very much impressed by men and women who give up their time to help others, but I am even more impressed with the young volunteers. I am grateful for the opportunity to work with such wonderful people and give a little back.

Star Fish Volunteers' Memorable Events on our 55th Anniversary

Star Fish Volunteer

Memorable Events

Michael Townley

The response to the COVID-19 Pandemic, which brought together concerned citizens and organizations like Star Fish, the YMCA, the Rotary Club of the Plainfields, and DuCret Center for Art to form the Plainfield Food Security Project. There was a remarkable outpouring of concern by Plainfield residents and non-residents alike for people in need of food. The project produced thousands of bags of food for people in need. And even more remarkable, Star Fish and the YMCA continue this Project seven years later! We provide food bags for 40 to over 100 families twice a month, and the Y provides volunteers to help distribute the food.

Pat Bernstein

The standout activity I've been part of so far is the massive November food delivery sorting event. Impressive as always! (* - see Note below)

Jason Thomas

I enjoy receiving the Thanksgiving donations, aided by an army of volunteers to make the work lighter for everyone. (* - see Note below)

Kathleen Nitzsche

I've been volunteering with Star Fish for as long as I can remember. Originally there were 2 Star Fish pantry locations in town, one for the East End and one for the West End. My mom, Eileen Cuniff, volunteered our basement for a pantry that covered the City's West End. My brothers and I started helping when we were kids because, as our mom put it, "What good have you done for someone today?" The best part of volunteering has been the people. Over the years, I've met so many generous, caring helpers who give their time and donations to make a difference. As Fred Rogers said, "Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping." As Star Fish celebrates its 55th anniversary's, I'm grateful to everyone who has helped feed our neighbors in Plainfield. Thank you for making a difference.

Note:

The Faith Lutheran Church in New Providence, working with that community with others, collects, separates, boxes and delivers a truckload of food every year on the Saturday after Thanksgiving. Twenty-five to thirty volunteers help unload and shelve the food at the Pantry.

PAST DIRECTORS

Mary Nischwitz

Kathi DeLucca

Linda Stanback and

Edna Shanok

Hugh Woodruff

Marie Pace

**We are grateful for
their many hours of
devoted service**



Kathleen presents Patty with a photo of Eileen Cuniff and Mary Nischwitz, two of the founders of Star Fish back in 1971.

Star Fish Volunteers' Representative Service Years and Hours

Volunteer	Years	Hours/Week	Total Hrs in 2025	Total Hours
Michael Townley	35	6.5	338	11380
Jason Thomas	2.5	3	156	390
Jim Naugle	0.5	3	156	78
Kathleen Nitzsche	35	4	208	7280
Karen Calta	5	5.5	286	1430
Avril Lecky	6	3	156	936
Patty Bixel	11	15	624	8580
Rich Gewirtz	23	4	208	4784
Eelco Swaak	3.5	4	208	728
Suzanne Stowasky	4	3	156	624
Raquel Watson	0.6	3	156	94
Pat Berstein	1.5	3	156	234
Pat Jackson	15	3	156	2340
Cathy Renga	15	3	156	2340
Joan McAlary	3	3	156	156
TOTALS	161		3276	41375

Star Fish Volunteers' Families Helped and Food Bags Distributed

2026 Adults, Children and Households Served 6 months					Bags of Food Distributed		
	Adults	Children	Total People	Total Households	AGENCIES	PFSP	Total Bags
January	407	349	756	193	123	160	283
February	255	449	704	148	80	176	256
March	292	306	598	172	377	83	460
April	357	321	678	181	208	102	310
May	503	368	871	239	415	114	529
June	471	405	876	232	110	138	248
Total	2,285	2,198	4,483	1,165	1,313	773	2,086

Agencies are our partners, like Plainfield Action Services; PFSP is Plainfield Food Security Project

ICE and CBP

We continue to exercise caution at the possible presence of government agents in Plainfield. We will do all that we can to discretely provide food for our families in need.

Donate via check payable to

Star Fish, Inc.

P.O. Box 2822

Plainfield, NJ 07062-0822

E-mail us at:

secretary@starfishplainfield.org

Phone: 908-755-8888

Donate at

www.tinyurl.com/starfishplfdinc

or www.starfishplainfield.org

Click on the *Contact or Donate* menu item, and then click on the "Donate" button as shown below.



Or use this QR code



Thank you in advance!

TJM FOUNDATION NEWS

We are so grateful to the employees and management of the TJ Max store in Watchung. They recently nominated Star Fish to receive a grant through their corporate foundation. Our grants person then completed the application.

Imagine our surprise when we were notified that we were awarded a grant of \$10,000.00! The award was presented during the grand opening of the new TJ Max store at the Blue Star Shopping Center in Watchung.

The store's manager, Derrick, graciously introduced our executive director, Pat Bixel, who explained to all how we work to feed the hungry in Plainfield; how community support is key to our on-going success; that businesses, churches, schools, families and individuals all contribute to that success.

Pat mentioned our weekly food distribution through our Partner Agencies, our teams of volunteers who pack and deliver that food, and the major effort to pack, deliver, and help hand out food bags at our walk-up Plainfield Food Security Project.

Patty expressed our sincere appreciation for the grant, then posed with board members Eelco Swaak, Kathleen Nitzsche, Cathy Renga, Derrick, and Patty (l to r) and the BIG \$10,000.00 check representing grant award. Grants like this help us forward on our mission "to provide emergency food assistance to people in Plainfield who find themselves in need."

