



# Food Pantry News

Volume 2, Issue 4

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Star Fish, Inc. is a tax exempt 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation. Donations are tax deductible as permitted by law.

## Pat Bixel is new Executive Director



A new era of leadership began this month as Patricia Bixel (right) was appointed executive director at Star Fish, Inc., the parent organization for the Star Fish Food Pantry in Plainfield. She succeeds Marie Pase (left) who has served in that position for the past 10 years.

“To be asked to direct the Starfish Food Pantry is flattering, humbling and exciting,” said Pat. “I hope I can serve my neighbors as well as Marie has done. She is truly a team player who earns respect from all of us. With the support of a truly dedicated team of volunteers and our “Friends of Star Fish” supporters, I believe we can all continue to accomplish many good things.”

Pat is a retired educator and administrator, having last served at Mount St. Mary Academy in Watchung as director of the Guidance Department for 25 years. “While at Mount St. Mary’s, I advised a group of students who prepared sandwiches and snacks for the Salvation Army in Plainfield, and conducted a Cereal Bowl campaign for Star Fish every year. The students collected nearly 2000 boxes of cereal, with the room collecting the most each year earning the right to display the Cereal Bowl Trophy.

*(Continued on page 2)*

## Board of Directors

**Pat Bixel**, Executive Director

**Michael Townley**, Secretary

**Kathleen Nitzsche**, Treasurer

**Sarah Mazzaresse**, Statistician

**Catherine Renga**, Chair Holiday Meals

**Joseph Stowasky**, Chair Food Procurement

**Marie Pase**, Board Advisor

### Newsletter

We welcome any comments or suggestions.

Send an email to  
Secretary@  
starfishplainfield.org



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## New Executive Director (cont'd)

“On the fifth Sunday of the month, several of my students prepared deserts for the neighbors of St. Mary’s parish in Plainfield. We also worked with other volunteers to serve Sunday dinners to one hundred or more people. I was very proud of my students as they became acutely aware of the needs of others and how we can all help those in need. For some this was an awakening. They eagerly looked forward to the next opportunity to serve.”

Pat and her late husband Dave were instrumental in founding the Hand in Hand Organization which brought together thousands of volunteers to Middlesex County College each May. Over the course of fifteen years, these volunteers shared in a day of activities and entertainment called the Hand in Hand Festival, designed for those considered cognitively or physically impaired.

Sharing her volunteerism at Star Fish arose during the seventeen years she and Dave lived in Plainfield. “Dave and I met the most generous, wonderful, fun-loving and energetic individuals we had ever met who believed in the dignity of each individual. They introduced us to Star Fish and all the good work its volunteers did for people. For the past forty years, I volunteered or financially contributed to their efforts whenever and however I could. Since my retirement from the Mount, I became a more involved member of Star Fish by volunteering regularly in the food pantry.”

The Board of Directors at Star Fish expressed their appreciation to past executive director Marie Pase by asking her to continue to serve as an advisor to the board. “Marie is one of those special individuals who takes on a volunteer assignment with all of the energy and enthusiasm needed to be an effective leader,” said Michael Townley, secretary at Star Fish, Inc. “She had only been a volunteer for a few years when she became director, but handled the job as if she had been there forever. Marie was a great ambassador for Star Fish, establishing close relationships with the agencies in Plainfield who were our partners in service.”

“I have always been especially impressed with her work ethic and her personal drive to do whatever was necessary to help Star Fish succeed in our mission,” said Catherine Renga, another Board member. “She was always there for the volunteers and our clients, assisting packing food or sorting donations and storing them on the shelves. She was a remarkable worker and leader, and we are all happy that she will continue to work with us in a new capacity.”

Pat learned about service to others through her late parents, Mary and Walter. “I truly believe that in these times we should help our neighbors who experience food insecurity,” said Pat. “The number of people in the United States who lack the basic means of obtaining food is unfathomable. If we are able to help our neighbors secure food for their families or themselves, then it is up to us to do so. We are blessed at Star Fish with the friends and the resources that help make this mission achievable.”

“We encourage anyone in need of emergency food to contact Plainfield Action Services at 908-753-3519,” said Pat Bixel. “The staff at PAS prepares a list of families in need which we take over the telephone. Our workers then package up food orders and deliver them to PAS, where the clients go to pick up their food.”

Donations can be made at [www.starfishplainfield.org](http://www.starfishplainfield.org).



## Plainfield Food Security Project Update

Thanks to the generosity of many individuals, families and businesses, the Plainfield Food Security Project was a huge success. The consortium of the Plainfield YMCA, the DuCret School of Art, the Rotary Club of the Plainfields, and our own Star Fish Food Pantry managed to give out thousands and thousands of pounds of food over the course of eighteen weeks.

Working out of the DuCret School, volunteers helped assemble, pack, and then hand out boxes of food for families in need. They also distributed pre-packaged groceries from the Community Food Bank of New Jersey and boxes of fresh fruits and vegetables through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's "Food for Families" program. We set up in the parking lot of the Salvation Army, handing out boxes of food to families from that area in a walk-up arrangement as shown in the photo.



Currently, the Project operates out of Parking Lot 7 in Plainfield at the corner of Park Avenue and East Seventh Street every Thursday. This is a one-day effort—the produce and/or groceries come in during the early morning and volunteers hand it out in the late morning and early afternoon. The site serves 300-400 families each week.

Star Fish is still a donor to the Project. Our volunteers on Tuesdays and Thursdays package up between twenty and twenty-five bags of groceries each week. Our Thursday driver, Bob (shown), delivers the bags to the Project site where they are added to the boxes going out on that same day.

The Project organizer, Kisha Belton, expects to run the Covid-19 relief project through November. See related story on Page 7.

## Covenant Church is a New Partner

Our host church, Covenant United Methodist in Plainfield, offered hot meals to the hungry every Monday evening until Covid-19 arrived. With that, the hot meals were canceled. To help fill the gap, the church has started a partnership with Star Fish to hand out grocery bags on those Monday evenings.

Working together, we've helped Covenant get established, sharing our lists and methods and opening our pantry to their needs. They've already held their own food drives, building up quite an inventory for their start-up on October 26.

Thinking of all of their potential and past clients, the folks are making up special bags for the homeless with foods that require no cooking or refrigeration. No reason for anyone to go hungry!

Covenant United was one of the founding churches when Star Fish was formed back in 1971.

## Mike Ramos Memorial Foundation Food Drive

Recently, we were contacted through our website by a young woman who wanted to know if we would accept food from a drive being conducted in Plainfield. We said “yes,” of course, and that set the wheels in motion.

LiAnna, Tanya and Mike Jr. are the adult children of the late Mike Ramos, who tragically died in May as a result of contracting the Covid-19 virus. He was only forty-five years old. They spoke very highly of their dad, clearly devoted to his memory and the good that he did during his short life.

The Ramos family brought a trailer load of canned goods, cases of water, disposable diapers, personal care products to the Pantry on October 20 afternoon. It was quite a load, as evidenced in the photos.

“We were expecting this delivery and arranged for some of our own volunteers to come help unload the trailer,” said Pat Bixel, executive director of Star Fish.



“We were all quite surprised to see this landscape box trailer loaded with boxes and bags of food and cases of water. It was truly amazing and more than we expected – such a blessing!”

The Ramos family distributed fliers in Plainfield and to the local stores and shops and business around their grandmother’s restaurant, Doña Irmás, at 239 Park Avenue. The fliers were posted for a week and listed some of the items that Star Fish provides to individuals and families in need of emergency food assistance.

The trailer was filled with donated items in a three hour span on October 17 as a continuous stream of people dropped off the needed items.

“Our dad was a generous man who gave freely of himself when he saw a need,” said LiAnna Ramos. “Whether it was hurricane relief in Perth Amboy or Puerto Rico, water needs in Newark, or any other disaster, our dad was always willing to help.

“He died in the prime of his life in May due to Covid-19. We wanted to honor his memory by doing something that he would have done himself to help others in need.”

We’ve just finished sorting the donated items into crates for storage while we use up older stock. And we’ve shared the bottled water with our new partners at Covenant Church for their project.

Thank you Ramos family!!



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## Grants and Donations Appreciated

As we all struggle through the impact of Covid-19, we see that people rise to the occasion when they see their neighbors in need. We have seen quite an increase in the number of contacts we receive through our website over the past six months or so. Everything from offers of food and money to offers to help with time and talent—the “Contact Us” page has been very busy.

Consider a few examples:

**Volunteer workers**— we staff the Pantry two days a week currently, and have picked up six new helpers. Some work every week, and others are available on a less frequent but regular basis. So we say “thank you” to Barbara, Iris, Joan, Stephanie, Mary Ellen, and Joan for giving their time and talents to help us help others.

**Grants**— our Friends of Star Fish continue to amaze us with not only their own generosity but also with their ability to expand their giving through matching donor programs and corporate grants. We thank such people as Thomas, who generously donated five thousand dollars that was doubled in a match by the company where he works. We thank Caity whose mother encouraged her to submit Star Fish to her employer for their corporate giving program, resulting in a ten thousand dollar grant.

**Donations**— We also thank the individual donors who use our PayPal link on the website for making one-time and monthly donations to help support our operations. All of these, from \$11 to \$500, are sincerely appreciated. We thank those of you who have supported us through the years. We mention as an example the folks at the Wilson Memorial Church in Watchung. The Outreach Committee generously provides for us each year, as does The Frippery Thrift Shop.



We thank the Scotch Plains Baptist Church, the folks at Faith Lutheran Church and at St. Stephen Episcopal Church in New Providence for their donations of food at Thanksgiving time each year. And how about the Plainfield Public Library that has their “Food for Fines” every year, donating their intake to our Pantry? We also recently received food from Sleepy Hollow Neighbors and separately from the Friends of Sleepy Hollow, two groups who saw their fellow Plainfielders in need and responded to that need with food and cash donations.

And let’s not forget Crescent Avenue Presbyterian Church, St. Mary’s Church, United Presbyterian Church, and the many, many others who collect food or checks to support our mission. Your generosity is simply remarkable. Thank you all for all that you do to support us.

If we missed citing you or your group as an example, please do not be offended. Every single dollar, every can of beans, every minute of work that is donated to us is as meaningful as the next. We couldn’t exist without all of you and your on-going support and generosity.

We are truly blessed.

## Change to our Holiday Meals Project—Please Read This!

The Covid-19 pandemic has reached every segment of our society over the past nine months and is still doing so as you read this. You know that we closed the Food Pantry for almost six months to help keep our volunteers safe and to respond to closures at our Partner Agencies.

Those Partner Agencies are slowly resuming operations, but a number of them are still not seeing their clients “face to face.” Again, sensible precautions being taken to help minimize exposure to and spreading of the virus.

The Board of Directors of Star Fish, Inc. has decided NOT to host the Thanksgiving and Christmas dinner packaging events this year so that we can protect all of our volunteers. We sincerely appreciate all of you who come out each year to help and who genuinely enjoy getting together as a team to help others. We're sorry that we cannot give you that opportunity this year.



Instead of packaging up holiday dinner bags, we will help our neighbors in Plainfield at Thanksgiving with ShopRite gift cards. The gift cards will be given to clients whose names we receive from our Partners, just as we usually do with the grocery bags and turkeys. Only this year, the clients will have the means to purchase what they want for the holidays at their favorite ShopRite store.

To prepare for the gift card distribution, we averaged the number of and size of families over the past three holidays and calculated that a family of 1 to 3 people will get \$50 card, a family of 4 to 6 people will get a \$25 and a \$50 card, and a family of 7 or more will get a \$100 card. These values should be sufficient to purchase what is needed for the holiday meals at a cost of \$11,000.00 for Thanksgiving this year.

Now, here's another piece of good news that came from this switch to gift cards. One of our Board members knew of a program at a local church where they are selling gift cards (including ShopRite) and earning money through those sales. The Board decided to purchase the cards we need through that church, helping them with their fundraiser and obtaining the cards at the same cost as if we had purchased from ShopRite directly. So a win-win for Star Fish, our clients, and the church's fundraiser.

Anyone wishing to donate to the holiday meals gift card purchases can do so at our website at [www.starfishplainfield.org](http://www.starfishplainfield.org)— just click on the “Donate” button. Or you can mail a check to Star Fish Inc., PO Box 2822, Plainfield, NJ 07062-0822.

Thank you all for your kindness and keep watch for announcements about the Easter dinner project—we may be able to do our normal packing event then, and you'll all be invited!

Stay safe, everyone—mask up—wash hands frequently—socially distance!

Please Spread the Word—No one should go hungry...



## FLU DRIVES

All flu drives 4–7pm. **Appointments + masks required**  
**Book Now @ [ucnj.org/flu](https://ucnj.org/flu) or call 908.518.4307**

<b>October 1</b> Elizabeth Peterstown Community Center 418 Palmer St	<b>October 29</b> Westfield Location TBD Check <a href="https://ucnj.org/flu">ucnj.org/flu</a> for info
<b>October 8</b> Plainfield Performing Arts Center 724 Park Ave	<b>November 5</b> Summit Community Center 100 Morris Ave
<b>October 15</b> Hillside Community Center 274 Hillside Ave	<b>November 12</b> Linden St. Theresa Church 131 E Edgar Rd
<b>October 22</b> Roselle Abraham Clark High School 122 E 6 <sup>th</sup> St	<b>November 19</b> Rahway Recreation Center 275 E Milton St

## FLU + FOOD EVENTS

Free and happening now near you

## FOOD DISTRIBUTION

More info @ [ucnj.org/food](https://ucnj.org/food)

<b>Cedar Brook Park Plainfield</b> Saturday 10/3/20 9am Saturday 10/17/20 9am Saturday 11/14/20 (Thanksgiving Box) 9am Saturday 12/12/20 (Holiday Box) 9am	<b>Kean University Union</b> Saturday 10/10/20 9am Saturday 10/24/20 9am Saturday 11/7/20 9am Saturday 11/21/20 (Thanksgiving Box) 9am Saturday 12/19/20 (Holiday Box) 9am
<b>Warinanco Park Roselle</b> Saturday 10/31/20 9am	

### Plainfield Food Security Project of the Plainfield YMCA—Every Thursday

October 29 marks the end of the USDA Farm to Families program that provided fresh fruit and vegetables to the hungry. The food distributions in November and December will include shelf-stable emergency food boxes. The Y will likely have a significant outdoor food packing event in November.

#### REUSABLE BAG COLLECTION:

Do you have a bag of bags at home? The Y is collecting new reusable food totes and bags for their packing event. If you are able to assist, please drop your bags off on any Thursday at Parking Lot 7 (see below). Consider a neighborhood collection event—they need approximately 1,200 bags by November 12.

#### SIGN UP TO VOLUNTEER IN PLAINFIELD:

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/4090A4FA8AA2EA3F85-week>

#### PROJECT STATS:

Since the Plainfield Food Security Project began in May, volunteers have contributed to delivering hope, dignity and nourishment to our neighbors!

17,000+ boxes | 14,000+ households | 52,000 individuals | 2,700+ senior deliveries

#### DISTRIBUTION LOCATION:

**DISTRIBUTION @ Lot 7** - Every Thursday from 9 to 12:30 | Park Ave & East 7<sup>th</sup> St, Plainfield, NJ (behind Scott Drugs) **PARK @ back of Lot 7**

**9-12:30** | Tasks include lifting and moving boxes; signing in clients in need of food; helping place boxes in trunks or on seats of cars or in back of trucks or vans; direct walkers to take one box per slip/adult; collect sign-in sheets; should be able to comfortably lift 30 lbs.

Any questions, please contact Kisha Belton Chubb—[kchubb@gscymca.org](mailto:kchubb@gscymca.org).

## Star Fish, Inc.

P.O. Box 2822

Plainfield, NJ 07062-0822

Phone: 908-755-8888

E-mail:

secretary@starfishplainfield.org

Donate at

[www.starfishplainfield.org](http://www.starfishplainfield.org)

Visit our website, click on the Contact or Donate link in the menu bar, and then click on the "Donate" button as shown below.



*We are a group of volunteers from Plainfield and the surrounding area who belong to a tax exempt, 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation in existence since 1971. We operate three days each week throughout the year, preparing and distributing grocery food orders to an average of thirty to thirty-five families in need each week.*

*Our primary function is to maintain the food pantry. Our volunteers pack and deliver grocery food orders to clients who have been referred to us by local social service agencies. Most of these agencies are listed on our website [Partners page](#).*

*Using a referral system helps us better manage our resources. These agencies vet the client to help assure that our limited resources are given to those truly in need. We also prepare special food orders for 160 families at Easter, Thanksgiving, and at Christmas.*

*The generosity of our donors helps us prepare these holiday meals and bags of food each week for those in need of emergency food assistance. You are all "Stars for Star Fish!"*

## The Food We Provide To Those In Need—Amounts Vary Based on Family Size

- 1 Package of frozen meat
- 1 Loaf of bread
- 1 lb of Pasta
- 1 Pasta Sauce
- 4 Cans Soup
- 2 Macaroni and Cheese
- 1 Small bag of tea bags
- 1 Jar Peanut Butter
- 1 Jar Jelly
- 1 Can of Fruit or Jar of Applesauce
- 4 Cans Vegetables
- 2 Can of Tuna
- 4 Cans of Beans
- 1/2 Dozen Eggs
- 2 box of cereal (or 4 Instant Breakfast Cereal envelopes for single persons)
- 1 dry or shelf-stable milk
- 1 Paper goods, 1 cleaning product, and 1 personal care item



You can donate any of these items at any time. Contact us and we'll even arrange to pick it up!

Too busy to do extra shopping? Donate instead and we'll buy it. Just go to [www.starfishplainfield.org](http://www.starfishplainfield.org) and click on the "Donate" button.