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EDITORIAL | NAME IN THE NEWS

Name in the News: Kim Bartenstein

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Kim Bartenstein

On the Garden Isle, where nearly 50 inches of rain fell in a 24-hour period in mid-April, touching off flooding and dozens of landslides, the Hawaii Foodbank started making deliveries before the storm subsided. And now, with cleanup-related challenges continuing, so is the assistance.

“Our Kauai staff has been working diligently with our community partners to acquire low-cost

and donated food and water to alleviate any additional stress for those in need," said Kim Bartenstein, the nonprofit's director of mission and quality assurance.

Also hammered by that harsh weather was East Oahu. In addition to making sure that food has been readily available for delivery there, Hawaii Foodbank is helping with a community pantry rebuild at Angel Network Charities, which is operated by Calvary by the Sea Lutheran Church in Aina Haina. A wall of water, estimated at more than 2 feet high, gushed into the charity's warehouse during a downpour on April 13.

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The relief effort underway at Angel Network — Hawaii Foodbank's largest food distributing agency in that area — and elsewhere underscore the year-round need to keep food bank warehouse shelves stocked. Last year, Hawaii Foodbank distributed over 13.7 million pounds of food from its warehouse sites in Oahu and Kauai.

Regarding challenges tied to Hawaii island's ongoing lava flow, Bartenstein said: "As the certified member of Feeding America (a nationwide network of hundreds of food banks), the Hawaii Foodbank works closely with our partner distribution organization, The Food Basket (the Big Island's food bank), making sure they have the support they need to help those who have been displaced by Kilauea's eruption."

Bartenstein, a Honolulu native, has worked in the nonprofit industry here for more than 25 years. At Hawaii Foodbank, she oversees activities that support relationships with partner agencies; recruits new agency partners; and fosters collaborative relationships between the private and public sectors to address community needs.

"I am humbled and honored to work with a group of people who wholeheartedly and efficiently work to help people who have come on hard times," she said, adding, "I'm proud to point out that 95 percent of our expenses go directly toward meeting the needs of those we serve."

Question: How did the 2018 Food Drive go this spring?

Answer: The 29th annual Food Drive was a profound demonstration of neighbors coming together to help neighbors. Partnering with our corporate sponsors, community organizations, military groups, churches and thousands of individual volunteers, we collected much-needed food and generous monetary donations guaranteed to help us hit our "One Million Meals" goal.

There's definitely been an influx of the "Top Five" items streaming into the warehouse —

canned tuna, chicken, canned meals, fruits and vegetables and lots of rice. It's been amazing ... something we could never have done without the support of the community at large.

Q: After you collect donations in curbside fishnets and by other means, where do they go?

A: Donations received at our various Food Drive sites are weighed and trucked to our warehouse in Mapunapuna where the food is inspected and sorted by volunteers. It's then packed into boxes according to type — meats, soups, fruits, dry goods, etc. — and made available in our warehouse shopping area for our member agencies to select and distribute into the local community.

Our partnership with more than 200 agencies allows Hawaii Foodbank to distribute over 1 million pounds of food to islanders in need every month.

Q: Is there a time during the year — between food drive efforts — when you are most in need of donations or volunteers?

A: The overwhelming community response to our Food Drive in April and NALC (National Association of Letter Carriers' "Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive") in May provides enough food to serve those who are at risk for hunger through the summer months, especially families with children who are not benefiting from the free breakfasts and lunches they would normally receive at school.

In the fall, our food reserves do get low and we partner continuously with altruistic businesses, organizations and individuals to secure necessary food and monetary donations.

... Our volunteer needs are ongoing. We're recruiting for volunteers on a daily or weekly basis to help inspect and sort perishable and non-perishable food items. And we need help with specific monthly projects and annual fundraising events. Right now, we need help packing boxes of food for our Senior Food Box Program (officially called CSFP), which is provided in partnership with the state Office of Community Services on one Saturday a month.

Q: One-quarter of the total poundage distributed by the food bank is produce. How is it collected?

A: Our produce comes from donations from the food industry, local farmers and grocery stores. Donations of produce are distributed through our 'Ohana Produce Plus program in 15 communities on Oahu including, Waianae, Wahiawa, Kalihi, East Oahu, Waimanalo and Honolulu.

Q: Last year, an estimated 1 in 5 Hawaii residents were in need of food assistance, with some 123,000 households receiving assistance annually. Are those numbers now higher or lower?

A: Hawaii Foodbank is still seeing a high need for assistance on Oahu and Kauai. ... We continue to see a rise in working families and seniors needing our assistance — 48 percent report choosing between paying for food and paying for housing. And 28 percent of these households are making the choice every month.

Also, 56 percent report choosing between paying for food and paying for medicine/medical care. And 28 percent of these households are making the choice every month. Our member

agencies continue to see an influx of clients at their distributions, making our presence in the community vital.

Q:What's the demand like for programs focused on kupuna and keiki needs?

A: The Commodity Senior Food Program (CSFP) distributes boxes of food to improve the health of low-income seniors. These food boxes contain supplemental foods such as nonfat dry milk, cheese, cereal, juice, peanut butter, rice, canned meats, fruits and vegetables. Approximately 1,800 seniors receive this assistance every month.

The Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) offers voucher booklets valued at \$50 to seniors with low income. Vouchers can be redeemed with participating farmer's market vendors in exchange for fresh fruits and vegetables. This program has reached its caseload capacity and interested seniors are now being wait-listed.

Food 4 Keiki ... provides meals to sustain children in low-income households over the weekend (when free school breakfasts and lunches are not available). ... Students at Princess Victoria Kaiulani Elementary School and Linapuni Elementary School in Kalihi receive pre-assembled food packages every Friday during the school year. Food 4 Keiki is made possible through support from corporate donors and the volunteers who prepare and distribute the packages, which include assorted snacks, ready-to-go-meals and beverages.

Our Food 4 Keiki program is definitely in high demand, but the investment needed to expand the program is challenging. As an alternative, we're working diligently to start a "School Food Pantry" program on Oahu. We'll be partnering with interested schools and community volunteers to open pantries ... that provide a secure and convenient way for students and families who are at risk for hunger to receive the nutritional support.

Q: What do you find most rewarding or enjoyable about your work?

A: I am inspired every day. From my compassionate co-workers who are so committed to fighting hunger, to our generous donors who give selflessly and collaborate with others in their communities, businesses and schools to raise food and funds, to our dedicated volunteers who show up week after week to inspect and sort food, to our tireless agency partners who so lovingly distribute food into the hands of the hungry.

But mostly, I'm inspired by the moms, dads, kupuna and keiki who work hard to rise above their difficult circumstances and who so humbly and graciously appreciate the support they receive. I'm truly blessed to know that our Hawaii Foodbank ohana is providing hope and making a difference in so many lives.

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