

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
December 19, 2018



Foodlink commemorates 40 years of service

'Muffin Day' celebration includes distribution at local soup kitchen

ROCHESTER – Similar to 40 years ago, the day began with a large donation of English Muffins.

On Dec. 19, 1978, founder Tom Ferraro collected a busload of Thomas' English Muffins – marking the first donation to what would later become Foodlink, Rochester's regional food bank. Every year, Foodlink commemorates that pivotal moment in its history by recognizing "Muffin Day," and on Wednesday morning, another donation from Thomas' arrived at its warehouse in honor of its 40th anniversary.

"We recognize 'Muffin Day' to honor our history, but also to recognize that the Foodlink of today -- a multifaceted operation with dozens of programs – began with the generosity of a single donor," said Foodlink President & CEO Julia Tedesco. "Our story is one of compassion, innovation and collaboration – and we value deeply all of the donors and partners who have supported our mission over the course of the last 40 years."

Foodlink wasted no time in redistributing 800 packages of muffins to the community. It delivered many of them to a local soup kitchen, St. Peter's Kitchen, where Foodlink staff helped serve Wednesday's meal – Chicken a la King over English Muffins – and helped pass out packages of muffins to individuals and families following the meal. Other packages were distributed to other member agencies, or mobile pantry stops in the region.

"St. Peter's is one of our long-time partners and such a valuable asset to this community," Tedesco said. "In celebrating our 40th anniversary, we felt it was appropriate to share the day with one of the many Foodlink member agencies doing excellent work to address food insecurity in our area."

Celebrating the milestone at St. Peter's also had historical significance. Ferraro went to elementary school in the same building that the soup kitchen now resides.

Ferraro began to address hunger and food insecurity in Rochester while working for Action For a Better Community in the late 1970s. After that first donation – for which he used an ABC Head Start school bus to haul away hundreds of English Muffins – Ferraro formed the Genesee Valley Regional Food Clearinghouse. It incorporated as an independent charity in 1983, then was renamed Foodlink in 1991.

Although Ferraro was partly responsible for launching a food bank network throughout the nation – he was a founding board member of what would later become Feeding America – he always knew food banking alone could not solve hunger. He oversaw the launch of several innovative programs, namely the Kids Cafe after-school meal program (1993), community kitchen (2001), Lexington Avenue Community Farm (2011), Value-Added Processing initiative (2012) and the Curbside Market (2013). Ferraro passed away in 2014, but his legacy remains strong.

“Tom recognized hunger as a symptom of other problems, such as chronic poverty, and not a root cause,” Tedesco said. “By addressing food insecurity in the Rochester region through this lens, and through his tendency to say ‘yes’ to challenges, he was able to have an immeasurable impact on so many lives in our area.”

Today, Foodlink distributes between 18-20 million pounds of food annually and collaborates with a network of hundreds of member agencies – food pantries, soup kitchens and shelters – to alleviate hunger for thousands of individuals and families. Numerous food-related programs that address barriers to a healthy lifestyle, such as food access, food literacy and unemployment, have allowed Foodlink to expand its role as a public health organization. The establishment of its new commercial kitchen in 2016 has allowed for the growth of its child meal programs, apple-slicing operations, and the launch of a new culinary training program, the Foodlink Career Fellowship.

Forty years later, Foodlink's footprint is larger, its staff is bigger and the services it provides to the community are more diverse. It all started, however, with a single donation of muffins. Learn more about Foodlink's 40-year history at www.foodlinkny.org.

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About Foodlink

Foodlink is a community food resource center and the Feeding America food bank serving Allegany, Genesee, Livingston, Monroe, Ontario, Orleans, Seneca, Wayne, Wyoming, and Yates counties. For 40 years, we have leveraged the power of food to transform lives, end hunger and build healthier

communities. Through good stewardship, innovation and collaboration, Foodlink mobilizes a diverse network of partners and stakeholders to eradicate both the symptoms and root causes of hunger.

Our suite of food access programs provides new access points to nutritious and affordable food in underserved communities. Our team of nutrition educators empowers people at risk of diet-related illness with the skills and knowledge to make healthy choices. Our food banking operations distribute millions of pounds of food to a network of hundreds of human service agencies throughout our service area. The Foodlink Community Kitchen prepares and delivers thousands of meals daily for Rochester children, supports our regional agricultural economy by slicing locally grown apples, and hosts a one-of-a-kind career empowerment program to train individuals with barriers to employment for careers in the regional food industry. Learn more about how we are creating healthy futures for every community we serve at www.foodlinkny.org, or follow us on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram at @foodlinkny.

For more information, contact:

Mark Dwyer
Communications Manager
(585) 413-5056
mdwyer@foodlinkny.org