

Celebrating 35 years with more Harvest memories



Winnipeg Harvest is celebrating its 35th anniversary. As part of our ongoing monthly series, here are a few more Harvest tales from the early days that tell us about Harvest and the character of our community.

Mr. Penner steps up

One of the first companies Harvest got involved with was Penner Foods. Mr. Penner was great.

He saw an article in which Lee Newton (Winnipeg Harvest founder) was being interviewed and called to say “heard you would take surplus food. I’ve got some surplus food and it’s still good. Can I give it to you?”

It was a game changer.

Mr. Penner’s endorsement carried a lot of weight. So much so that people from his church volunteered to help with the pickups. The Harvest crew was able to leverage this spirit in the community and take it to new heights.

The crew visited the five churches located around a participating food store. We would ask each church to take one day. They would pick up the product, take it back to the church and sort it for us, and we would collect it later in the day. This was huge. We ended up running four big food programs with 20 churches actively involved — without having to ask for money. We asked for food and time to feed the hungry — and they stepped up.

It was the Penner family, their store and their church that really got the grocery store food donations flowing.

Today, Harvest has active food donation programs with all the major grocery stores, including Co-op Foods, Costco, Safeway/Sobeys, Save On Foods, Superstore and Walmart. Many of the food banks in our provincial network are also operated by various church communities.

Now we’re rolling

With the increase in food donations from the Penner stores, Harvest needed a ‘company car’ to collect surplus food. Just in time, another community-minded Manitoban stepped up.

Responding to our need, the late John



Ian McCausland Photography

Winnipeg Harvest currently has a fleet of 20 trucks distributing one million pounds of food through its network of 300-plus food banks and agencies every month.

Robertson, then host of CBC-TV’s 24 Hours news program, came to Harvest and dropped off his van.

“Take the keys,” he said. “I don’t need it anymore. You can have it.”

And that’s how we got our first vehicle. John’s generosity played a big role in our ability to pick up food and share it with the community.

Today, Harvest uses a fleet of refrigerated trucks to collect and distribute food to vulnerable Manitobans all across the province, so if you have one to spare, feel free to give us a call...

The bread you love

Bread is a ‘royal staple’ in the realm of nutrition. It goes into almost every hamper Harvest assembles. We need a lot of it to feed 70,000 people a month: hard-working families, hungry kids and older adults, struggling on fixed incomes.

About 25 years ago, the Balcuinas family, who owned Natural Bakery (still do) decided that instead of running two or three lines a day, they would run a fourth line of fresh bread and donate it to Harvest — and they have been doing it ever since.

The stars that shine

Another staple of Harvest is its volunteers. Today, there are some 10,000 of them across the province and we simply could not feed

our neighbours without them.

In the early years, we had no money and no staff. Many of our volunteers were clients, who relied on Harvest for food. They knew hunger. They knew insecurity. They understood the impossible choices people were forced to make to feed themselves and their families when things were tight.

Like stars at night, they rose above these challenges, got back on their feet — and then gave back to the community that fed them. It meant a lot to them to help others. Along with food, they served up true empathy and hope, and changed a lot of lives.



For 35 years, Winnipeg Harvest has been nourishing our community, and our sense of community.

With your help, it will go on for another 35 years. Donate now. Your gift of just \$35/month will feed a hungry child for a year. Call 204-982-3581 or make an online donation at winniepegharvest.org

For more information on Winnipeg Harvest and its programs, visit winniepegharvest.org