

# S.A. Food Bank will have bigger cupboards to fill

By Jennifer Hiller Updated 12:15 am, Thursday, December 20, 2012



Photo: JOHN DAVENPORT, San Antonio Express-News

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Bill Day (right), Executive Director of Media Relations for Valero Energy Corporation, speaks Wednesday December 19, 2012 at the San Antonio Food Bank about Valero's \$3 million donation to the Food Bank. [... more](#)



The San Antonio Food Bank on Wednesday announced it has raised \$15 million to double its facility, capping off the largest capital campaign in the organization's 32-year history.

The big donations came from a small group of corporations, foundations and local philanthropist and entrepreneur **Harvey Najim**.

The money will let the food bank add 100,000 square feet to its facility off Texas 151 on the West Side and ultimately serve more fresh produce and meat to the people who need its services.

The construction, which will be completed this summer, will triple the size of the food bank's refrigerated and frozen storage, and add an outdoor pavilion that could host farmers' markets or act as a staging area for volunteers working in an expanded community garden.

"These are the largest gifts we've ever received," said **Eric Cooper**, president and CEO of the food bank. "I tell you, I'm freaking out."

At the announcement at the food bank, Spurs **Coach Gregg Popovich**, who donated to the campaign, pointed out some dismal statistics: One in four children in the community is at risk for hunger. And the food bank, which served about 25,000 people per week in 2008, now feeds 58,000.

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"I'm not sure our whole city understands why we're here," Popovich said.

While it's great to announce \$15 million in donations, Popovich said it's also sad there are so many hungry people in the San Antonio area.

"It also should anger us to some degree," Popovich said. "It should embarrass us to some degree."

**Ester Geffre** is executive director at the **Guadalupe Community Center**, one of more than 500 agencies that partner with the food bank on distribution.

"It's like a revolving door. We have clients all day long," Geffre said. "Fortunately, we have the food to give them."

Geffre said she noticed more people needing help starting about four years ago, and clients now include everyone from infants to the elderly, the homeless to military families.

On Wednesday, one of the clients, a 69-year-old woman, was also volunteering at the community center. She's not required to do volunteer work, but said she has been grateful for the help she has received in both food and clothing, and wants to give back.

She asked that her name be withheld.

Her retirement check, which comes once a month, hasn't been enough to cover all of her expenses.

"I get very sentimental," she said, her voice wobbling. "This time of year is very hard to get through."

More than 259,000 people in Bexar County, 15.7 percent of the population, were at risk of going hungry in 2010, according to a report by Feeding America.

More than 118,000 Bexar County children, or 26.8 percent, live in households where food is scarce, the report found.

Planning for the food bank expansion started about 2 1/2 years ago. The organization moved into its facility in 2006, the result of a \$10 million capital campaign that included a \$1.5 million donation from the **Kronkosky Charitable Foundation** — the biggest single donation the food bank had received until now.

For this expansion campaign, H-E-B donated more than \$3 million, including \$2.5 million in cash and the rest in product donation; Valero gave \$3 million, the USAA Foundation gave \$1 million and the Kronkosky Charitable Foundation donated \$1 million.

Najim, who has been on a giving spree and plans to donate \$8 million to local charities by the end of the year, handed Cooper a \$2 million personal check in an envelope.

The food bank also received \$4 million through **New Markets Tax Credits**, a federal program that helps build facilities in low-income communities.

The remaining \$1.5 million came from Popovich and his wife Erin, Barbara and **Michael Gentry** and the **Greehey Family Foundation**, who didn't want the exact amount of their gifts announced publicly at the event.

Cooper said the city of San Antonio donated 5 acres to allow for the expansion. **Kissing Architecture and SpawGlass, the general contractor, have made in-kind donations on the project.**

The donations will pay the full cost of the facility expansion project, allowing the food bank to focus instead on its day-to-day work.

It also will give the facility more parking. In addition to the 60,000 people who rely on its services, the food bank has 1,000 volunteers coming and going every week.

Cold food storage has been a particular problem in the wake of the 2008 economic downturn and the uptick in hunger. Cooper said the food bank receives donations of leftover cooked food from hotels, caterers, restaurants and the like, which require refrigerated storage. He also would like to offer clients more fresh fruits and vegetables.

To back up its current refrigerated and frozen storage, the food bank has relied on refrigerated diesel trucks — "a refrigerated **Band-Aid**," in Cooper's words — as a stopgap measure.

"Hopefully the economy strengthens and we can serve less people, but with the space we can better nourish them," Cooper said. "We want to have the right food in the right amount at the right time."

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