

A second serving of kindness



Barbara Bronstein

BY BRANDI SMITH

Another major nonprofit group with a CRE connection is Second Servings of Houston, which helps feed the area's hungry with leftover food from catered events.

"I noticed a lot of last-minute no-shows at charity banquets and was quite horrified to learn that most of the unserved food was being thrown away," said Barbara Bronstein, who started Second Servings in 2014. "I knew there must be a way to redirect this surplus to people in need."

Bronstein, a retired marketing professional who's called Houston home for more than 30 years, consulted with the Houston Food Bank, the City of Houston Health Department and experts in food and social services. That's when she discovered that "food rescue" was happening all over the country, in communities large and small.

"We pick up and deliver the food the same day to approved charitable meal sites," she said. "With almost 1 in 5 people facing food insecurity in Harris County, and a growing food waste problem, it is essential that we redirect perfectly edible surplus food away from the landfill to the people who really need it."

The program has grown exponentially since its start, but the biggest boost came when Hilton Americas, Houston's largest hotel, agreed to donate its surplus food in 2015.

"That's a lot that would have gone to waste but we're able to touch lives to give the food

to the homeless, to people who really want food. It's God-given," Ruffy Suoaiman, Hilton Americas executive chef, told Houston TV station KTRK.

Another source of help has been Bronstein's husband, Martin, a founder and senior principal at BHW.

"Martin is a skilled entrepreneur with countless contacts in the community. He has helped introduce me to CRE professionals, who have been very supportive of our efforts," said Bronstein. "In fact, one CRE colleague, Melanie Edmondson of Phase Engineering, introduced me to Joy Horak-Brown, President and CEO of New Hope Housing, where we deliver healthy, chef-prepared meals from food donor, Snap Kitchen, every week.

Bronstein said Second Servings has now rescued more than 100 tons of food from more than 50 donors across the city. Additionally, the group now serves nine charity sites, which include soup kitchens, shelters and affordable housing projects.

"Our operation is extremely efficient, providing 33 meals for every \$1 we spend," she said.



One challenge facing the organization is transportation. Second Servings arranges all pickups and deliveries from donor sites to the charities, without ever warehousing the food. This keeps costs down and food safety up. While the organization relies on several of its charity recipients to provide transportation, the organization recently purchased its first refrigerated vehicle, thanks to a generous grant from the Moody Foundation.

"Our goal is to become a sustainable and scalable organization that provides a dependable source of food for people in need," Bronstein said. "We want to constantly be expanding our food donor network, so we can reach more charity recipients with a growing food supply. This will require additional vehicles, drivers, and staff."

Those interested in corporate sponsorships, individual gifts or volunteering can contact Bronstein by emailing bbronstein@secondservingshouston.org or calling (713) 824-6605. ●

