



**Budget:** \$100K  
**Gifts in-kind:** \$48K  
**Established:** 1984  
**Paid staff:** 0 **Volunteers:** 30  
**Service strategies:** Caring for the elderly, working poor, and homeless, providing emergency food, staples and well-balanced meals.

# Food bank extends its hands to the hidden poor

Fountain Hills, AZ

**S**urrounded by striking mountain vistas and the brick-red Arizona desert, scenic and affluent Fountain Hills is an oasis in the sand. Though more than 173,000 Arizonans go hungry each week (*Arizona Poverty Report, 2003*), most would find it incomprehensible that such need exists among the upscale homes and manicured lawns of this thriving utopia.

Like opposite ends of the spectrum, the Fountain Hills famous city fountain sprays a plenteous 7,000 gallons of water per minute higher than the Washington Monument, while the Extended Hands Food Bank (EHFB) delivers 7,000 pounds of food to 3,200 residents who would otherwise go hungry.

“When I learned in 2004 that the food bank was in danger of closing,

I knew I had to step in and do anything necessary to keep this fount open,” said Director David Iverson. “It is a critical resource for about 800 families each month. Without it north of Phoenix, folks would have to travel over an hour one-way for help.”

In addition to distributing this monthly supply, EHFB provides fresh produce, fresh and frozen meat, and dairy each day. “For a mother to have fresh bread, fruits and vegetables, even a cake or box of brownies that will make her kids happy, it makes her life seem better, less frantic, more normal,” said volunteer May Fowler.

According to Iverson, changing economic conditions or crises such as death, loss of a job or a layoff can

quickly plunge a household into poverty and despair. Without the food bank, many would find themselves without help or hope.

There is no human services department or public outreach like this in Fountain Hills.

Iverson told of one couple who arrived for help in a new Mercedes. “Both he and his wife had lost their jobs and were quickly thrown into chaos. The car was leased, so they couldn’t sell it. They lost their home. And by the time they came to us, they had been

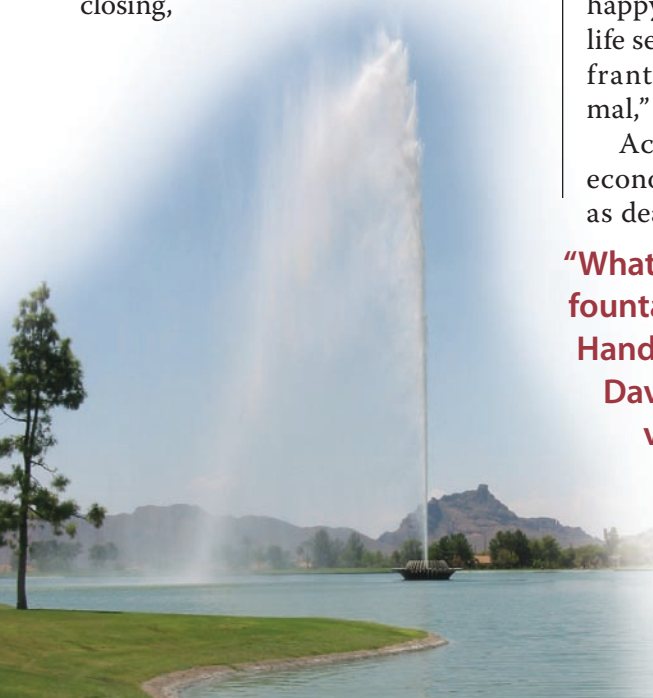


living on only eggs for two weeks.”

Known for its wealthy population, Fountain Hills is more economically diverse than is realized, Iverson said. “EHFB serves many elderly on limited Social Security, the ‘working poor’ who are employed locally at minimum wage, and single moms who barely get by.” Nearly one in seven Arizonans live in poverty and are at risk of being hungry, according to Arizona’s Department of Human Resources.

**G**iving comes full-circle. “Thanks for being part of our lives in the rocky times,” wrote a single mom recently to EHFB.

**“What flows from your fountain?” asks Extended Hands Food Bank Director David Iverson, who volunteers to provide a lifeline to 3,200 “hidden poor” in Fountain Hills. “Pity is useless; people need compassion; they need a helping hand.”**



“When life hits you hard, it’s those basic kindnesses that stand out the most, a shared meal, a smile of compassion, and a hand when you need one,” said Janet Thomas. “When you’ve been given a hand, you want to turn around and lend one yourself.”

A grandmother on a fixed income, Thomas first came to the Food Bank when she was suddenly in the position of caring for her teenaged grandson. “This is the finest food bank I have ever seen,” she said. “The food is fresh, the bread so soft, and there are no maggots.”

Thomas gives back by volunteering to organize, label and coordinate food boxes four days a week. “I enjoy working here,” she said. “It makes you feel good when you go to bed at night, knowing what you did and how you helped others in need.”



**Partnerships.** Iverson secured grants, donations, and loans, along with much of his own savings, to purchase, update, and keep the Food Bank open in 2004. “It became a labor of love,” he said. “I consider this a natural extension of my work as a pastor. The work we do here represents His hands extended.”

EHFB partners with St. Mary’s Food Bank and the Arizona Association of Food Banks to keep the shelves stocked with food ready for distribution. Local grocers and restaurant owners have also been generous with weekly donations.

Through volunteers, EHFB is able to meet the need and provide food for the poor in Fountain Hills and its surrounding communities. However,



**No. served annually:** 4,000  
**Ethnicity:** 50% Hispanic, 40% Caucasian; 10% African-American  
**Audits:** Available upon request  
**Programs:** **Emergency Food Boxes.** Low-income and destitute people who qualify through a simple application receive boxes of nutritious food, a balanced diet that feeds a family of four for four days, without charge. (The same boxes are available at any time for \$10.)  
**Co-op Bulk Purchases.** Anyone is welcomed to this Cash ‘N Carry program to purchase \$40-50 worth of frozen meats and food for \$15.  
**Feed the Homeless.** A dozen volunteers hand out emergency supplies, food, clothes and hot meals to the 150 homeless who gather at Tempe Lake Park every 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Saturday of the month.

## CONTACT

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getting food to those who are hungry.”

EHFB’s biggest need is for more storage. Iverson hopes to double existing space in the coming year. “I have

meeting monthly expenses is a constant challenge. With guidance from the Collaboration for a New Century foundation, Iverson has streamlined processes and pulled the ledger accounts from red to nearly black.

A Compassion Capital Fund grant for \$6000, brokered by the Collaboration, allowed the food bank to repair their forklift and purchase two pallet jacks, one with scales to more accurately weigh the food. Keeping better records of shipping and receiving allows Iverson to monitor exactly how many people the bank serves.

“The Collaboration has helped us learn how to recruit recipients such as Janet as volunteers, and how to track their hours.”

“More than half of Arizonans eligible for food stamps and assistance go without due to an extremely complicated application process,” said Collaboration C.E.O. Steve Capobres. “The Extended Hands Food Bank is a crucial link to

sources for so much more food than I can handle. For instance, there is a pasta company that wants to donate their broken boxes, food from shipment pallets that have fallen, and so forth. But where can I store 700 lbs. of macaroni?”



To maintain a larger space would require a more hefty budget, so Iverson volunteers on the fundraising trail, speaking regularly to local churches and service clubs.