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MY VIEW MARY FERGUSON

Handing out food is a joyful experience

By Mary Ferguson
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Editor's note: This article is the latest in an occasional series on hunger and food insecurity in the Santa Fe area.

This is a story about the joy that comes from both giving and receiving — the joy that food brings to our community and those who help provide it.

Even though I run the Neighbor to Neighbor Fund Drive for The Food Depot as a volunteer, I also wanted to experience the front line of a food distribution. When a morning drive-thru pantry coincided with a visit from my two grandsons, it took a nanosecond to decide — they were coming along.

As the sun rose over Santa Fe, we arrived at the warehouse on Siler Road. Cars were already stretched as far as the eye could see. Mason, 15, was assigned 10-pound bags of potatoes. Logan, 12, got the bread pallet, and I was given “pantry bags” filled with shelf-stable items. After guidance from staff, we were ready to begin.

The distribution is simple, yet effective. Each volunteer stands by an assigned pallet as two lines of cars pass through. Clients drive slowly and pause as we load their trunk or back seat with groceries. Today everyone received a variety, including grapes, milk, eggs, lettuce and — a personal favorite — melons.

At first, I was overwhelmed by the action. However, I soon found my rhythm and began to notice more about the people and volunteers around me. I started to see the joy in this busy, early morning with my grandsons.

Every car told a story. Trunks belonging to seniors told stories of retirees trying to live on Social Security. The diversity of nationalities and languages reflected the widespread need for food access across every neighborhood in our city. Vehicle decals revealed professions: construction, housekeeping, teaching and medical care. Almost every car brought joy to our task.

Throughout the two-hour distribution, a chorus of “Good morning!” and “How are you?” echoed through the lines. Everyone was grateful for the food. Some of the joy came from the freshness and quality. One woman asked with a smile, “Are the dehydrated pinto beans here again this week? I used them to make tamales.” I was thrilled to say, “Yes!”

I was surprised. I expected to feel good from doing good, but I didn't expect to feel this mutual joy in the giving and receiving of food.

Toward the end of the morning, a car with four little kids pulled up. Logan started to reach for their bread. “Wait one second,” he said, bending down into his tote. Like a magician, he pulled out a gorgeous sheet cake decorated with balloons and flowers. Slowly, enjoying every minute, he walked it over to the car. The little boys squealed with delight. Pure joy.

Afterward, I took my grandsons out to breakfast. We talked about hunger and what we could do. But mostly we talked about how being part of The Food Depot made us feel — as though we were setting something right, making the world work the way it should.

In a world filled with challenges, the work of The Food Depot brings fulfillment and hope. By volunteering, you don't just distribute food — you spread joy, restore dignity and create a ripple of kindness that echoes far beyond the act itself.

Even more important, behind each volunteer is the enormous infrastructure required to keep the warehouse full and The Food Depot's fleet moving across a 26,000-mile service area. The Food Depot's operation takes thousands of supporters and donors.

I hope you'll join us in this mission and discover a piece of the joy that transforms lives. Every donation makes a difference — every dollar provides four meals! Learn more at thefooddepot.org/n2n.

Mary Ferguson is the volunteer organizer of Neighbor to Neighbor, The Food Depot's largest fundraiser. It began in June and concludes Sept. 23.