

FEATURED

# Valley Forge Tourism and Convention Board kicks off annual Freedom From Hunger food drive

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“Dollars generated by this year’s Valley Forge Freedom from Hunger campaign will support MAHN’s COVID-19 response efforts. Consequences of the pandemic are threatening the stability of thousands of Montco households. Staying fed is a real challenge for many of them now. The charitable food network is not able to address the increase in demand without help.”  
— Paula Schafer,  
Executive Director,  
MontCo Anti-Hunger  
Network

**#MAKEITMONTCO**

DONATE & SHARE!  
COVID-19 SUPPORT

SIXTH ANNUAL  
*Valley Forge*  
**FREEDOM FROM HUNGER**

**15,000 LB GOAL**

**September 1-30, 2020**

The Valley Forge Tourism & Convention Board (VFTCB) will be collecting monetary donations for the sixth annual Valley Forge Freedom from Hunger Food Drive from September 1-30. Due to COVID-19, this year’s drive will take place solely online.

The VFTCB is again partnering with the MontCo Anti-Hunger Network (MAHN) – a coalition of hunger relief organizations working together to make healthy foods available to all communities in Montgomery County.

- Donations benefit MAHN and its mission to help feed the less fortunate in Montgomery County.
- Each year, the goal has increased for donations
- Since the Freedom from Hunger Food Drive began in 2015, the VFTCB has collected more 25,000 pounds of food to feed the hungry in Montgomery County.
- The 2020 goal is 15,000 pounds of food to get to a lifetime goal of 40,000.

**Did you know?**  
The Valley Forge Freedom from Hunger Food Drive was created as a farewell “gift” to Pope Francis in 2015 when the Pontiff stayed in Montgomery County at the St. Charles Borromeo Seminary during the World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia.

Please consider making a monetary contribution to help us achieve our goal. To learn more, visit:  
[valleyforge.org/hunger](http://valleyforge.org/hunger)

★ VALLEY FORGE  
★ TOURISM & CONVENTION BOARD

The Valley Forge Tourism and Convention Board has kicked off its annual Freedom From Hunger Food Drive. The event will run through Sept. 30. This year — all donations will be monetary donations made through the tourism agency's website. This photo shows a poster for this year's food drive.

Submitted Photo

UPPER MERION — The Valley Forge Tourism and Convention Board has kicked off its annual Valley Forge Freedom From Hunger Food Drive. This is the sixth year for the annual event, which aims to build awareness about hunger in Montgomery County.

Like so many things in day-to-day life, this year's event is being adjusted due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic — and will take place completely online throughout the month of September. What that means is, the agency and its partners for the drive will be accepting monetary donations to purchase canned goods and other food instead of physical donations.

The goal for this year's Freedom From Hunger Food Drive is 15,000 pounds of food. In monetary terms, the goal is to collect about \$5,000, which will provide the resources to obtain the 15,000 pounds of food, according to a spokeswoman from the Valley Forge Tourism and Convention Board.

The annual event launched on Tuesday, Sept. 1 and will run through the end of the month.

The agency is again partnering with the MontCo Anti-Hunger Network (MAHN), a coalition of hunger relief organizations working together to keep families stable with food assistance.

This year, the food drive has taken on increased importance, as participation at many of the county's food pantries is higher than normal — due to coronavirus and its economic impact.

According to MontCo Anti-Hunger Network officials, so far this year, 73% of 34 its member food pantries have seen an increase in volume, in some cases double, or even triple, especially when nonessential businesses were shut down.

"At that time, the increase at high-volume pantries in Norristown and Lansdale saw as much as a 200-300% increase in client numbers," the organization said in a press release.

"We take our commitment to this drive, this community, very seriously," Mike Bowman, president & CEO of the Valley Forge Tourism and Convention Board, said in the release. "We made a promise to serve our neighbors in need, and they need us now more than ever. COVID won't stop us. We can fight this virus, and hunger, by coming together."

In the spring, following the shutdown of schools and businesses, the tourism board promoted online donations to the MontCo Anti-Hunger Network raising nearly \$2,000 to help the organization purchase several thousand pounds of food.

"Dollars generated by this year's Valley Forge Freedom from Hunger campaign will support MAHN's COVID-19 response efforts," Paula Schafer, executive director for the MontCo Anti-Hunger Network, said in the release. "Consequences of the pandemic are threatening the stability of thousands of Montco households. Staying fed is a real challenge for many of them now. The charitable food network is not able to address the increase in demand without help. We're thankful for the support of businesses like the VFTCB that understand how community well-being is strengthened when all of us are fed."

Some of the MontCo Anti-Hunger Network's COVID-19 response work includes direct to pantry delivery of 56,710 pounds of COVID-19-prompted food donations, dollars for wholesale food purchases, operating equipment needed by food pantries to keep up with demand and distribution assistance to pantries temporarily closed for virus remediation, she added.

Last year, the Valley Forge Tourism & Convention Board "shattered" its previous record by collecting 11,337 pounds of food during its three-week drive. The total amount collected was nearly double the stated goal for 2019 of 6,000 pounds of food. More than 25,000 pounds of food have been collected over a five year period.

The Freedom from Hunger Food Drive was established in 2015 as a farewell pledge to Pope Francis, who stayed in Montgomery County at the St. Charles Borromeo Seminary during the World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia.

The MontCo Anti-Hunger Network provides resources to food pantries that feed more than 15,000 households a year and serve the more than 80,000 people who are food insecure in Montgomery County.

For more information about the MontCo Anti-Hunger Network visit [www.montcoantihunger.org](http://www.montcoantihunger.org).

To donate to the Valley Forge Freedom from Hunger Food Drive visit [www.valleyforge.org/hunger](http://www.valleyforge.org/hunger).

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