

[nourish news]

December 2025 Community Update from *Waste Not Want Not*

[From the Executive Director]

Dear **Friends**,

It's been a little while since our last newsletter, and we're excited to be back with a fresh new look! Our goal is to bring you content that's both informative and fun—delivered straight to your inbox each month. We hope you enjoy the new design, and we'd love to hear your thoughts.

If you have a special talent such as poetry, photography, or storytelling, we would be thrilled to feature your work in an upcoming issue. And, if there are topics, or questions you'd like to see covered in *Nourish News*, please reach out to Avery Cecere at avery@WasteNotFlorida.org.

As we close out 2025, we are reflecting on just how transformative this year has been. Here are a few highlights:

We secured the largest single monetary gift in our history, enabling critical refrigeration upgrades and a long-awaited expansion of the Castle. After presenting our plans to the Town of Orange Park in October - and receiving approval! - we are now awaiting final structural engineering and expect to break ground in January. Our goal is to have air conditioning installed before the summer heat arrives. **Kelly Gentry and Linda McKenzie** are leading efforts around temporary relocation and timeline planning; please feel free to contact them with any questions.

We celebrated our **35th Anniversary** in grand style. We held our **"Corks & Forks"** gala, which featured Waste Not Want Not's founder **Deb Smyers** and Jacksonville Jaguar Legends Thomas "Tommie Mac" McManus, Aaron "Killer Beas" Beasley, and Donovin "Double D" Darius. Combined with our 2nd Annual *Tee'd Up to End Hunger* event, these celebrations raised more than **\$60,000** to support our mission. We celebrated our volunteers throughout the year with a volunteer dinner, bourbon and wine tasting event, and will be hosting our holiday event—**Jingle & Mingle** on **Saturday December 20th**, at the castle.

We proudly **welcomed new leadership to our board of directors**. **Paul McDaniel** joined our board in June and demonstrated such outstanding leadership that he was elected Vice Chairman. In addition, we welcomed **Erin Jones (CSX)** and **Kenya Moore (Cox Media Group)** who joined us in November of this year.

We welcomed **new food donors**, contributing nearly **50,000 pounds of additional rescued food** this year.

We hosted our first-ever **Feeding Friends and Neighbors**, partnering with eight community organizations and individuals to provide food for **209 families** during the government shutdown and uncertainty around

SNAP benefits. This will now become an annual November tradition in recognition of National Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Month.

We welcomed **Avery Cecere** to our team as our Mission Delivery Support Lead. Avery, who lives in Madrid and is originally from West Palm Beach, supports Kelly and Linda a few hours each week to help ensure our mission is delivered equitably, consistently, and intentionally.

Friends, this year has truly been extraordinary. None of this would have been possible without the expertise and dedication of **Kelly and Linda**, the passion and commitment of our **volunteers**, the support and guidance of our **board of directors**, and the generosity of our **donors**. If you are one of the many people who make our work possible—**thank you**.

If you'd like to help carry this momentum into 2026 and beyond, please consider **making a donation by clicking [here](#)**.

Wishing you and your family the very best this holiday season—and looking forward to a bright and prosperous New Year ahead.

Warmly,



Kathleen N. Spears, PhD, MHA
President & Executive Director

[Community Nourishment]

As we approach the holiday break, our team has worked closely with our Title I school partners to ensure students have access to **nutritious food** beyond the classroom. For many children, especially in low-income households, school-meals are a crucial source of nutrition and often their most reliable source of food. As such, it is essential that we continue providing food to those students during winter break.

This month, we've focused on **"bulking up"** the take-home bags each back-pack program provides by adding extra pantry staples, and kid-friendly meals and snacks so families have what they need during the extended time away.

Thanks to our volunteers, donors, and school partners, we're able to bridge the gap and make sure no child enters the holidays hungry. Our partner schools and back-pack programs include, Montclair Elementary, Wilkinson Middle School, Lake Asbury Jr. High, Tiger Academy, WE Cherry, Feed the Need Putnam, McRae Elementary, Orange Park High School, and Pace Center for Girls.



Fresh produce loaded and ready to go!



Food prepared for backpack programs.

[Partner Highlight]

Waste Not Want Not serves over 200,000 individuals in need each year. We would not be able to do what we do at the level at which we do it, without our food distribution partners. Our partners have their boots on the ground, working the front-lines in the hunger fight day in and day out. **We want you to get to know our partners.** Therefore, each month, *Waste Not Want Not* will highlight one of our partners in the fight to end hunger. This month we highlight **Putnam Pantry.**

What is your mission?

Putnam Pantry's mission is to help feed the needy in West Putnam County.

How do you serve the hungry and impoverished in our community?

Over 70 percent of the people we serve are elderly. We pass out food to nearly 750 families, over 2,230 people, weekly and biweekly.

How does Waste Not help you execute your mission?

Waste Not Want Not has been a major contributor in providing food for our distributions, especially bread and canned goods.

What do you love most about your organization?

We mostly enjoy giving food directly to the people. They come through the line with shopping carts, and we get to know them, hug them, and for those who want prayer, we pull them aside and pray with them. Some of the elderly arrive an hour early just to socialize.

We are more than grateful that *Waste Not* has partnered with us for the betterment of helping the least among us.

Thank you all from the bottom of our hearts for your help.



Putnam Pantry serves West Putnam County with compassion, dignity, and care, feeding hundreds of families each week.



Fresh bread and pantry staples ready for distribution at Putnam Pantry, helping ensure neighbors have access to nourishing food weekly.

Birthdays & Volunteer-Versaries



Happy birthday to our volunteers with December birthdays:

Pat McKinney, Laura Ramsey, Minette Torres, Bob Johnson, Hawke Asher, Jay Higgins, Brent Kugler, Leland Tuttle, Darrell Murphy, Tom Canaan, Susan Easley, Raylin Powden, Esther Zeigler, Eric Hartman, & Edward Rooney

We make every effort to ensure our birthday and anniversary list is accurate and up to date. If we missed your birthday, please let us know so we can update our records. If you prefer not to be included in the monthly birthday "Well-Wish List,"

please let Linda know by emailing Linda@wastenotflorida.org or giving her a call.

We're working on updating our volunteer anniversary records!

For some of our long-time volunteers, we may be missing early start dates in our records.

If you've been volunteering with us for many years and happen to know the year you first got involved, **we'd love to hear from you**. Please send anniversary date to Linda@wastenotflorida.org so we can keep our records accurate. Thank you for being part of our community!

[Supporter Spotlight]

Waste Not Want Not is fortunate to be supported by individuals, churches, companies, and an incredible network of food donors. This month, we are delighted to spotlight one of our newest supporters: **Dillard's – Orange Park Mall**.

Our relationship with Dillard's began with a simple question: *Would you be willing to donate an item to our gala auction?* Volunteer **Christie Hingst** made the initial ask, and **Catharine Wells**, Marketing Director for the Orange Park Mall, quickly followed up, and sealed the deal. Their generosity resulted in an auction package valued at more than **\$1,350!**

But... Dillard's kept on giving!

To celebrate both the **Orange Park Mall's 50th Anniversary** and **Waste Not's 35th Anniversary**, Dillard's hosted a special **percent-of-sales day** on September 24. Shoppers who mentioned *Waste Not Want Not* during checkout generated a **10% donation from their purchases**, and Dillard's even provided gift cards to boost participation. Their combined efforts raised more than **\$1,000** to support our mission!

In November, during the Mall's **Weekend of Giving – “Yes We CAN”** food drive benefiting *Waste Not Want Not*, Dillard's once again stepped up—kicking off the weekend with a donation of **more than 300 pounds of canned and shelf-stable food**. They closed the event with a spirited **celebrity fashion show**, featuring local community members and familiar faces from around Clay County including Orange Park Mall manager – **Randy Bowman** as well as Waste Not Want Not board member **Tillery Durbin** and her daughter, and **Andrea Crowder** of the Way Free Clinic, and local therapist **Ruth Swissa**.

Dillard's Store Manager **Dan Stettler** emphasized that community support is deeply woven into the Dillard's brand. “Supporting the community that supports us matters,” he shared. “We know food insecurity remains a significant challenge in Clay County, and we're committed to helping address it.” We are deeply grateful for Dillard's generosity, creativity, and commitment to our neighbors in need, and we look forward to a continued partnership in the year ahead.



Weekend of Giving fashion show produced by Dillard's featured Waste Not board member Tillery Durbin and her daughter Reagan.



Dillard's store manager Dan Stettler and team delivering over 300 pounds of food.



A generous gala auction package donated by Dillard's, valued at more than \$1,350.

Did you know our **yard sale** is now held monthly? **Join us every first Saturday** of the month outside of Challenge Enterprises, 526 Kingsley Ave in Orange Park, at 8 AM, and get some great steals and deals while **helping fight hunger + poverty!** We hope to see you on the sidewalk on **January 3rd!**



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