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Solving summer hunger

Abbey Group BBQ Friday; Food City launches effort

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Elodie Reed, St. Albans Messenger

Sherry Underwood, left, and her daughter, Abbey, are both working through the family business, The Abbey Group, to end summertime hunger. The group is hosting a barbeque in Taylor Park in St. Albans on Friday from 5 to 7 p.m. to raise awareness and funds for Hunger Free Vermont. The event is free and open to everyone.



By **Elodie Reed**
Staff Writer
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ST. ALBANS — Outside the winter holidays and their gatherings, big meals and general spirit of generosity, it's easy to forget: there are people in this community without enough food on the table. The need to eat is present year-round.

According to the statewide group Hunger Free Vermont, 1 in 5 children are food insecure in Franklin and Grand Isle counties, and 1 in 8 households across the state lack food security. That number has risen 45 percent since 2000.

'We're just trying



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A male turkey stops traffic to usher a mother duck and her ducklings across Lower Newton Rd. Photo by Joel Lehman. [t.co/hAFQrxYcBY](#)

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Fortunately in the northwestern part of the state, several local groups are making special efforts to collect food and provide meals this summer.

**everything we
can to make it
happen.'**

- Abbey Underwood

The Abbey Group

The Abbey Group based in Sheldon has more than 80 food service accounts across Vermont, New Hampshire and New York, including 12 schools in Franklin County. Owner Sherry Underwood and her daughter and marketing director, Abbey, reiterated in an interview Tuesday that the family business is dedicated to feeding the children it serves, in school and out.

"We're just as invested in these children as anyone else," said Abbey.

The Abbey Group partners with Hunger Free Vermont during the school year to help children and households secure food and advocate against hunger, and it also feeds children in the summer. Last summer, the group provided more than 50,000 meals to kids across the state, with 6,836 breakfasts and 9,311 lunch meals served in Franklin County alone.

This year, The Abbey Group is looking to increase summer meal programs locally and beyond. Currently, four schools in Franklin and Grand Isle counties offer meals to children outside of the school year (for full list of summer meal sites for schoolchildren, see accompanying box).

Ultimately, the goal is to see every school offer summer meals. "Not all the schools are capable of doing this [now]," said Underwood.

"We're just trying everything we can to make it happen," added Abbey. "There's always hope for the future."

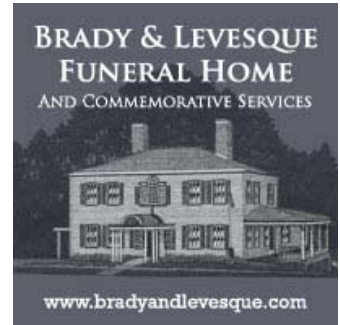
In the meantime, The Abbey Group will hold a barbeque in Taylor Park in St. Albans City on Friday to raise awareness and donations for Hunger Free Vermont. Hamburgers, hot dogs, chips, pasta salad, watermelon and drinks will be offered from 5 to 7 p.m., as will information about ending hunger in Vermont.

"It's for everybody," said Abbey. A \$3 donation is suggested, but not required.

The Abbey Group is also working with the Vermont Food Bank, which donates food and funds to regional food shelves such as Northwest Family Foods in St. Albans. The group is donating \$2,500 in cash to the statewide organization in an effort to end summer hunger.

The Abbey Group is also distributing about 2,500 food items collected during a week-long drive in May. After asking all of its food service accounts to participate in the food drive, the group received non-perishable foods for the food bank from 25 of them, including four Franklin County schools.

"It's turned out fabulous," said Underwood. "Our goal is to hopefully do this every spring because the food banks are depleted from the winter."



She added, "This is the role that The Abbey Group has decided to play, and we're very proud of it."

Food City

In St. Albans City, Food City recognizes the shortage food shelves face in the summer, and this year, the grocery store is making a special effort to help out.

The "Best Wishes" program began last Friday, and it will run to the end of June. Shoppers can pick up a \$5 bag and donate it to Northwest Family Foods, adding more macaroni and cheese, tuna, chicken noodle soup, rice, potatoes and corn to it's shelves.

According to store manager Tracy Lowell, the program is something the store was trying out. In just a few days, more than 90 bags had been donated to the food shelf.

"We're just testing the waters here," Lowell said by phone yesterday. "It's been doing very well."

Lowell said with more advertising and with this trial run as an indicator, the "Best Wishes" program could be a regular event at Food City.

"Most people don't think to help the food shelf during the summer," she said. "Maybe we could do this more often."

Summer food venues ...

Building Bright Futures of Franklin and Grand Isle Counties have settled on Vermont Summer Meal sites that will offer free breakfast and lunch to children while school is out of session. Please check your local area for meal service times, or go to the Child Nutrition Programs website for hours and site contact information.

School children can receive free meals at:

- Barlow Street – Rec Dept., St. Albans
- Blooming Minds Daycare, St. Albans
- St. Albans City Hall
- St. Albans City Elementary School
- St. Albans City Pool
- Enosburg Elementary School
- Richford Playground
- Montgomery Rec Center
- Alburgh Community Education Center
- Isle La Motte Elementary School

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