



# SERVINGS

News from the East Texas Food Bank

**2025 Fall Newsletter** Give Now: [etfb.link/250112](https://etfb.link/250112)



## Closing the Weekend Hunger Gap for East Texas Kids



Brenda is a single mom in Tyler. She works as a realtor, but times have been tough for her family, and she needed a hand-up to help feed her children.

***"The Backpack Program provides healthy, nutritious food for my children that they enjoy eating. It has been a great help to me, so I don't have to worry constantly if I have enough***

***resources to feed them," said Brenda. "I used to have enough money to buy whatever groceries I needed, but my family circumstances changed, and all of a sudden, I wasn't sure how I was going to provide for them."***

Brenda's story is not uncommon. Every week, countless children across East Texas face hunger when school meal programs pause for the weekend.

That's why our Backpack Program exists—to fill the gap and ensure kids have the food they need to thrive. Each Friday, school staff identify students and discreetly place a bag of nutritious, kid-friendly food in their backpacks. These bags contain items like fruit, juice, cereal bars and shelf-stable milk to help them through the weekend.

In the last fiscal year alone, 193,000 backpacks were distributed to more than 8,500 children across 23 counties.

***"Good nutrition is critical to success in school," said Kinsey Thompson, Community Initiatives Director. "Numerous studies have shown that adequate nutrition, particularly during early childhood, is crucial for brain development and supports cognitive function, which directly impacts learning abilities and school readiness."***

**Your support can make a difference.** For just \$150, you can provide a child with a backpack of food every weekend for the entire school year.

## FOOD BANK ROTARY CLUB UPDATE

This year, ETFB board member Jeff Johnston helped launch something new: the Food Bank Rotary Club in Tyler, a group dedicated to service, leadership and fighting hunger in our community.

***"The Rotary Club is a service organization that brings leaders from various backgrounds together to address community and global needs," said Johnston. "This group is making a huge difference in Tyler as we work to fight hunger and feed hope in East Texas."***

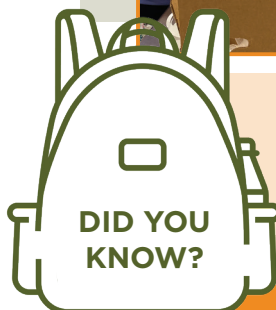
Rotary Clubs are known around the world for their commitment to service, goodwill and leadership. With over 1.4 million Rotarians globally—and many clubs in Texas—this new Tyler-based group brings a fresh focus to hunger relief and community connection.

***"We have over 25 members and would love to grow this group," said Johnston.***

Each month, members of the Food Bank Rotary Club in Tyler come together to volunteer, learn and lead—contributing their time and talents to fight food insecurity in East Texas. Johnston, who's been a Rotarian since the 1980s, brings decades of service experience and a deep passion for helping neighbors in need.



**Want to get involved? Stop by the ETFB Volunteer Center (3201 Robertson Road in Tyler) on the first Monday of the month at 5:30 p.m. to learn more.**



**The first documented Backpack Program began in Arkansas in 1994, when a school nurse noticed that children arriving at school on Mondays were tired, hungry and not ready to learn.**

**Visit [EastTexasFoodBank.org/backpack](https://EastTexasFoodBank.org/backpack) to support our Backpack Program!**



## A Special Message From Our Chief Development Officer

As autumn settles in and we embrace a season of gratitude, I would like to pause and thank you, from the bottom of my heart, for being such a vital part of the East Texas Food Bank family.

September is Hunger Action Month for us and our partners, and for many children, the beginning of a new and exciting school year! However, the heartbreaking reality is that too many children still arrive at school with empty stomachs, struggling to concentrate because dinner was skipped the night before. No child should have to face the day hungry, but because of your compassion and support, many don't have to.

Together, WE are rewriting that story. Because of you, backpacks are being filled with weekend meals, pantries are stocked with fresh, nourishing food and families are greeted not just with groceries, but with dignity and hope.

This is what real change looks like. Every meal distributed, every child who goes to school with a full belly, every parent who feels just a bit more secure. That's your impact in action!

We're not just fighting hunger. We're building a future where everyone in our community has the food they need to thrive. And with you by our side, we know anything is possible. Let's keep going. There's so much good we can do together!

Tim Butler  
Chief Development Officer, ETFB

## CORPORATE PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

For more than 25 years, DKT Investments—owner and operator of 23 Whataburger locations across East Texas—has been a valued partner in the fight against hunger.

Each holiday season, Whataburger customers have the chance to make a difference by donating just \$1 to the East Texas Food Bank. In return, they can write their name on a festive ornament that's proudly displayed in the restaurant.

***"Some of our restaurants receive so many donations they end up papering all the walls with ornaments," added DKT Investments Director of Marketing Nicole Jones.***



Through this longtime partnership, customers have helped provide an incredible 846,854 meals to East Texans facing hunger.



***"We are so thankful to have this incredible partnership with DKT Investments," said Starla Bickerstaff, ETFB Director of Organizational Engagement. "During this 25-year history, Whataburger customers have donated funds to provide over 846,854 meals."***

DKT Investments is also expanding its support of the community with its newly

opened Layne's Chicken Fingers restaurant in Tyler—another opportunity to give back.

We are truly grateful for the generosity of DKT Investments and their customers. Their support shows how small donations, given with heart, can really add up to make a difference.

## A CHURCH COMMUNITY FEEDING BODY AND SPIRIT



At the East Texas Food Bank, we're grateful for the local churches that help bring our mission to life. One of those churches is Church on Purpose in Longview, led by Pastor Eric Love—a partner deeply committed to feeding the hungry.

***"So many people are in need, and we as Christians are supposed to help them spiritually but also physically," said Love.***

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***“We do not have to beg for volunteers at my church. We present the opportunity, and they just come.”***

Twice a month, Church on Purpose brings together members and community volunteers of all ages to serve fresh produce to more than 400 households in need.

***“We rely on partner organizations like Church on Purpose, to serve our neighbors at our mobile pantry locations,” said Blair Matthews, ETFB Programs Outreach Manager.***

On distribution day, there’s a spirit of joy and service as volunteers fill bags with onions, peppers, carrots, cucumbers and melons. Neighbors line up, grateful for the nutritious food they’ll take home.

One of those neighbors is Kathie, a widow living on Social Security.

***“The cost of living is so high, and fresh produce is so important. I live on just my social security, which is***

***not enough to take care of all my bills, so this food keeps me alive. I appreciate that we have a program like this as seniors like me could not make it without this.”***

For Pastor Love and his congregation, serving others is both a calling and a joy.

***“Volunteering fills a void in all our hearts to serve, makes us sleep good at night,” said Love. “Helping the community is the cherry on top of an amazing feeling.”***

Thanks to community partners like Church on Purpose—and donors like you—ETFB can continue delivering food, hope and dignity across East Texas.



## VOLUNTEERS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

On a quiet morning in Henderson, cars line up around New Life Church, each one waiting patiently. For many low-income seniors in Rusk County, this monthly food distribution is more than just a box—it’s a lifeline.



***“We distribute over 4,600 of our senior boxes each month all over East Texas,” said Michelle Rodriguez, ETFB Senior Hunger Programs Manager. “Volunteers build the boxes at the ETFB warehouse and volunteers help run these sites to give out the boxes.”***

These boxes provide essential groceries to seniors who may otherwise go without. And it all happens

thanks to a dedicated team of volunteers—many of whom have personal connections to the work.

Take Roy, who serves faithfully each month.

***“I have never had enough money to give, but I can give of my time and experience. I love the sense of community. I have been food-insecure before, so I understand when someone needs a hand-up sometimes.”***

Or Glenna, 78, from New London. A former professional wrestler, she now volunteers—and receives support through the program.

***“I volunteered for 20 years for a Henderson pantry, but now as a widow on a fixed income, I appreciate the extra meals. God told me I needed to help, and here I am.”***

The need is growing—and so is the opportunity to serve.

***“We are so thankful for all of the individuals, churches and businesses who give of their time to make this happen each month,” said Rodriguez. “We always need more assistance, so we hope East Texans will consider adopting a location and be a part of this mission.”***

Together, we can ensure no senior in East Texas goes hungry.

### WANT TO HELP?

Visit [EastTexasFoodBank.org](http://EastTexasFoodBank.org) and click on Volunteer to find opportunities near you.





## TURNING DOLLARS INTO MEALS WITH VIRTUAL FOOD DRIVES

Instead of collecting and delivering canned goods, your group can raise funds online—helping ETFB stretch every dollar and feed more neighbors across East Texas.

Setting up a Virtual Food Drive is simple:

1. Visit [EastTexasFoodBank.org](http://EastTexasFoodBank.org).
2. Click on Join the Fight and select Virtual Food Drive.
3. Fill out the form, then share the link with your team to start collecting donations and tracking progress.

Whether you're a school classroom, a church group or a company team, a Virtual Food Drive makes a big impact (with less hassle)!

## TURKEY TACO RECIPE

### Ingredients:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 medium zucchini, carrot or sweet potato | 1 15.5 oz can low-sodium chopped or crushed tomatoes              |
| 1/4 medium head of lettuce                | 1 tbsp chili powder   |
| 2 large tomatoes                          | 1 tsp garlic powder   |
| 7 oz low-fat cheese shredded              | 1 tsp oregano   |
| 1 15.5 oz can low-sodium pinto beans      | 1/2 tsp salt  |
| 1 lb lean ground turkey                   | 1/2 tsp black pepper  |
|   | 1 package 100% whole wheat or corn tortillas; or hard taco shells |

### Instructions:

1. Rinse, peel and grate carrot, sweet potato or zucchini (if using zucchini, grate but do not peel). Squeeze dry with paper towel.
2. Rinse and shred lettuce. Rinse, core and chop tomatoes.
3. In a colander, drain and rinse beans.
4. Coat a large skillet with non-stick cooking spray. Heat over medium-high heat. Add turkey and brown.
5. Add grated vegetables, beans, canned tomatoes, chili powder, garlic powder, dried oregano, salt and black pepper. Stir well.
6. Reduce heat to medium. Cook until thickened, about 20 minutes.
7. Add 2 tablespoons cooked meat mixture to each taco shell. Top each with 1 tablespoon shredded cheese, 1 tablespoon shredded lettuce and 1 tablespoon fresh tomatoes.



Interested in even more healthy recipes? Visit our website! [easttexasfoodbank.org/programs/recipes](http://easttexasfoodbank.org/programs/recipes)

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