



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Three local food organizations merge to better fight food insecurity**

WISCONSIN RAPIDS, Wis. – The South Wood Emerging Pantry Shelf (SWEPS), The Neighborhood Table (TNT) and Rapids Family Backpacks (RFB) have merged into one nonprofit organization to better combat food insecurity and develop related services in the South Wood County area. The new organization's name is Feeding Our Communities with United Services (FOCUS). All current services will continue under the merged organization.

FOCUS will be led by a board of directors headed by Terri Rapp, chair; Mary Schultz, vice chair; Dale Bikowski, treasurer; and Scott Stewart, secretary. Directors include Barb Bondioli, Cindy Holberg, Lisa Borre, Mare DeByl and Andrea Weiland.

This merger builds upon the shared commitment by SWEPS, TNT and RFB for serving residents of the South Wood County area with dignity and respect and improves upon the services already provided. Additionally, FOCUS will immediately begin exploring opportunities to expand services.

Until a shared location can be identified to house the combined organizations, each organization will conduct "business as usual" in their current locations with no foreseeable impact to current clients. Clients will continue to receive the services they currently use.

A committee of the three services is working to combine operations under the new organization. The process for donations remains unchanged. People wishing to make a donation to any of the three services may continue to do so by making their donation payable to their preferred service.

"We are fortunate to have outstanding employees and volunteers who keep our operations running like well-oiled machines," said Terri Rapp, chair. "Our first and highest priority will be to seek a location that meets the requirements of our various needs including refrigeration, freezer space, clean storage for our food, a loading dock, capacity for serving meals and space to fill the near 100 backpacks that are filled each week with needed food. We are excited about the future as we seek a location in which to co-locate."

Vice Chair Mary Schultz added, "While we are not able to immediately co-locate, the merger makes sense to move in this direction. Our like-minded goals to fight food insecurity in this area will make our community a better place for all residents. Once we are co-located, it will be a great convenience to the people who use our services to come to one location for their food and free meals that are offered in an atmosphere of hospitality and mutual respect."

Regarding the Rapids Family Backpacks service, Barb Bondioli said, "We are excited about this merger and look forward to everyone working together to provide these needed services. The Wisconsin Rapids area is very fortunate to have such wonderful volunteers and a dedicated team to lead this effort."

(more)

### **About the South Wood Emerging Pantry Shelf (SWEPS)**

SWEPS began in 1975 as a nonprofit organization to provide food to area residents in emergency situations. It has been generously supported by members of the community and the First Congregational Church, 311 – 2<sup>nd</sup> Street South, Wisconsin Rapids. Over the years, the organization grew to serving approximately 4,000 people annually with volunteers provided by local churches. In the fall of 2015, the SWEPS board approved the reorganization and move of SWEPS in order to better meet the need for food in the South Wood County area. Effective November 16, 2015, SWEPS became known as the South Wood Emerging Pantry Shelf and now operates at 331 – 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue South, Wisconsin Rapids. SWEPS now serves more than 16,000 people annually. Routine days and times of operation are: Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays from 12 noon to 4:00 pm, and Tuesdays from 4:00 pm to 7:00 pm. Effective February 1, 2020, SWEPS merged with TNT and RFB to form a new nonprofit organization called Feeding Our Communities with United Services in a unified effort to fight food insecurity. Those interested in volunteering for SWEPS should send a request to [swepsfoodpantry@solarus.net](mailto:swepsfoodpantry@solarus.net). Updates about SWEPS can be found on [Facebook.com/SWEPSofWR/](https://www.facebook.com/SWEPSofWR/) or at [www.swepsantry.org](http://www.swepsantry.org).

### **About The Neighborhood Table (TNT)**

TNT has been a nonprofit charitable organization since 2003 with the mission to reduce hunger, improve the quality of life and create an awareness of the needs that exist in the Wisconsin Rapids community and surrounding area. The organization was formed in late 2003 and has grown to serving approximately 20,000 meals annually on about 75 meal dates. TNT meals are served every Thursday and the last two Tuesdays of each month. More than 115 different groups, businesses and clubs in the area sponsor TNT meals. Core volunteers of TNT carry out the meal/soup kitchen program by offering a free meal to anyone in need. Meals are served from 4:30 pm to 6:00 pm at the United Methodist Church of Wisconsin Rapids, 441 Garfield Street, Wisconsin Rapids. Take-out meals are available on Thursdays only by calling 715-422-1980. The program serves the communities of Wisconsin Rapids, Nekoosa, Port Edwards and surrounding areas in central Wisconsin. Effective February 1, 2020, TNT merged with the SWEPS and RFB to form a new nonprofit organization called Feeding Our Communities with United Services in a unified effort to fight food insecurity. To learn more about TNT, available volunteer opportunities, or to make a donation, please visit [www.theneighborhoodtable.org](http://www.theneighborhoodtable.org) or [Facebook.com/TheNeighborhoodTable/](https://www.facebook.com/TheNeighborhoodTable/).

### **About Rapids Family Backpacks (RFB)**

RFB, whose mission is "Providing nutritious weekend meals in a backpack for Wisconsin Rapids Public Schools families facing hunger" is in its ninth year of serving families in the community. Families with students that attend the Wisconsin Rapids School District (K-8th) and Assumption Catholic Schools (K-5th) are eligible to receive these weekend meals-in-a-backpack. Enrollment for this program is through WRPS or ACS participating schools. RFB currently sends home over 80 backpacks weekly, filled with ingredients for a healthy meal, a breakfast item, and some meal stretchers. Recipe sheets with other community resource information are also included in the backpacks. RFB has many community partners that help make this program possible, including River Cities High School, where the RFB pantry is located, and whose students and staff pack meals each week. Other community partners include SWEPS, where a second RFB pantry is located, and Kwik Trip, that coordinates a voucher program for perishable food. In 2019, RFB served 800 individuals. Effective February 1, 2020, SWEPS merged with TNT and RFB to form a new nonprofit organization called Feeding Our Communities with United Services in a unified effort to fight food insecurity. For more information about RFB, please visit [Facebook.com/RapidsFamilyBackpacks/](https://www.facebook.com/RapidsFamilyBackpacks/).

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