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Orange County United Way Teams Up with Local Food Banks to Promote Healthy Food Options for Orange County Families

\$300,000 “Banking on Better Health” Grant to Second Harvest Food Bank and Orange County Food Bank supports community-wide action plan to tackle childhood obesity

IRVINE, CA (December 3, 2014) – Orange County United Way announced today a key partnership with Second Harvest Food Bank and Orange County Food Bank to promote healthy food options and reduce the rate of childhood obesity. A \$300,000 collaborative grant made by United Way to the partnership will help increase local families’ access to healthy and nutritious foods, including fresh fruits and vegetables.

“At United Way, we are committed to increasing the number of healthy youth in Orange County by one-third within the next ten years,” announced Orange County United Way President and CEO Max Gardner. “That starts with increasing access to healthier food options among families struggling to make ends meet in our community. We’re pleased to partner with these two fantastic organizations that can help make our vision for Orange County’s future a reality.”

United Way’s health access and prevention strategy is part of its 10-year FACE 2024 community-wide action plan. Established in October 2013 following an 18-month stakeholder engagement process, FACE 2024 is creating pathways to a stronger community by advancing Education, Income, Health and Housing. Specific goals are to:

- Cut the county’s high school dropout rate in half
- Reduce the percentage of financially unstable families county-wide by 25 percent
- Increase the number of our community’s healthy youth by one-third
- Cut in half the number of homeless and housing-insecure children in Orange County

It’s been estimated that there are 370,000 food-insecure individuals in Orange County – 156,000 are children. Cutting into that number starts with providing healthier options, through innovative delivery methods.

“United Way recognizes the connection between nutrition and health, and is investing in the health of vulnerable Orange County residents,” explained Mark Lowry, Director of the Orange County Food Bank. “These funds will provide for nearly 200 tons of nutritious non-perishable foods, one million pounds of fresh produce and four new

aquaponic farming systems that empower local communities to be more engaged in the production of their own healthy food.”

Aquaponic farming is an environmentally sound and less costly alternative for families and communities to increase access to nutritious food sources. It combines aquaculture with hydroponics, a soil-less farming system that incorporates fish and plants in a symbiotic relationship similar to that found in nature. This new partnership would help to bring this innovative practice to Orange County.

The bulk of the funding in the “Banking on Better Health” partnership will be devoted to bolstering the two food banks’ collective Farm to Family efforts. The program salvages excess fruits and vegetables (such as apples, oranges, watermelons, carrots and cabbage) from farms throughout Orange County and the state. Food is then received by each food bank’s respective distribution centers to be inspected by volunteers prior to delivery to agency and school partners throughout Orange County.

“Hunger has grown in Santa Ana and we are always trying to keep up with the demand for food” said Connie Jones, Executive Director at SW Minority Economic Development Association. “This partnership between the OC Food Bank and United Way will help SMEDA with resources to acquire more food and add to our donations so we can help more people in the poorest neighborhoods in Santa Ana.”

In addition, the partnership will support food provision at two elementary schools where United Way recently launched two new SparkPointOC Financial Empowerment centers. Finally, the collaboration will also support increased access to food by nine local food pantries in partnership with United Way.

“We are proud to partner with United Way to improve the health of less-fortunate families by providing the equivalent of more than 300,000 meals of fresh produce,” said Nicole Suydam, CEO of Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County. “This will enable Second Harvest and its community partners to reach some of the county’s most food insecure residents, especially the many at-risk children, through our School Pantry program to help improve their health and lower their risk of obesity.”

This partnership compliments United Way’s recent seed investment in the Waste Not OC coalition which is working to equip Orange County’s restaurants and hospitality industry with the capability to provide their healthy excess food—that would otherwise be thrown away—to local families.

ABOUT ORANGE COUNTY UNITED WAY

Since 1924, Orange County United Way has been working to improve lives and strengthen our community by mobilizing the caring power of Orange County. To do this, we focus on the building blocks for a good quality of life: Education, Income, Health and Housing. By investing in Orange County's children, families and individuals, we help them meet their most basic human needs, including food, shelter and medical care, while at the same time creating pathways to self-sufficient futures through education and training. In short, we help people help themselves. Through our new 10-year initiative "FACE 2024" (an acronym for **F**und, **A**dvocate, **C**ollaborate, **E**ducate), United Way is mobilizing local businesses, community organizations, governmental agencies and individuals to make a long-term measurable difference in the lives of local individuals and families. To learn more or to join our movement, visit www.unitedwayoc.org.

About Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County

Second Harvest Food Bank's (SHFB) mission is to end hunger in Orange County. For 30 years, SHFB has been dedicated to developing programs to increase awareness of the hunger issue in Orange County. SHFB primarily operates by collecting food from places where there is a surplus, and distributing it to areas of Orange County where there is a need. Its network of 340 partner agencies, which are local non-profit organizations that provide critical safety net services, assist in distributing food to approximately 200,000 food-insecure individuals each month.

About Orange County Food Bank

Orange County Food Bank (OCFB) is part of a larger private non-profit community service organization – the Community Action Partnership of Orange County (CAPOC) and distributes nearly 20 million pounds of food each year to vulnerable people. Nearly 400 other charities rely on OCFB for the food they distribute. Those organizations include churches, senior centers, shelters, community centers, and social service agencies. Those charities feed seniors on fixed incomes, individuals with disabilities, the unemployed, homeless persons, and the working poor. OCFB also feeds 1,400 people directly each day in communities throughout the region.

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