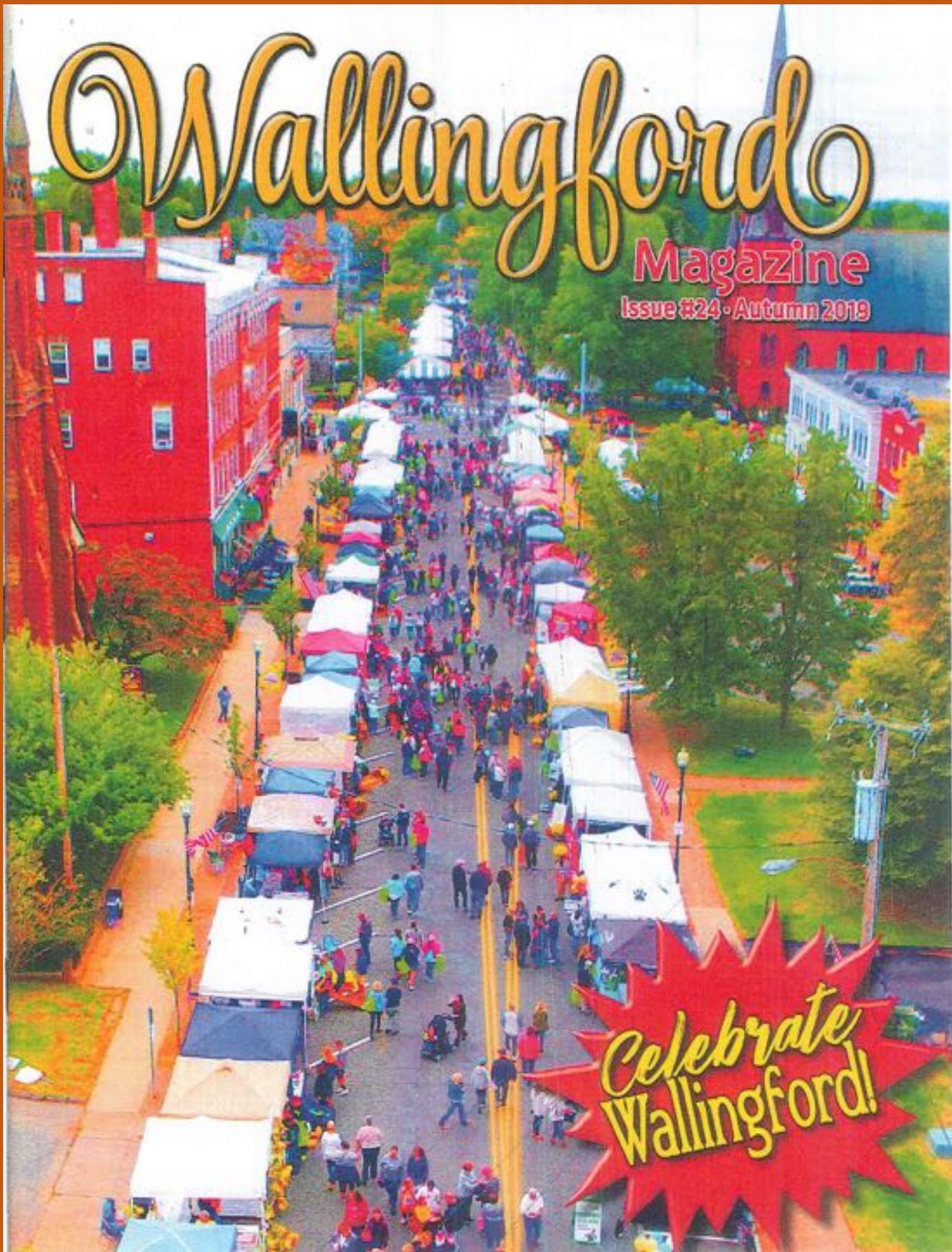


Wallingford

Magazine

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Celebrate
Wallingford!





Most of us are fortunate to have close family around us, a roof over our heads, enough food on a daily basis, and other true necessities to cover the basic life needs of our families. Regretfully, not every household in Wallingford is as fortunate. As individuals and families, we are responsible for our own well-being. As a community we want to contribute to the well-being of those around us.

No family chooses to be homeless. No community is eager to recognize the presence of the homeless within its own boundaries. It is no secret that many communities in America, and around the world, struggle with the number of families who are unable to bring basic life needs into their homes.

Twelve years ago, the Founder of Master's Manna, and a small band of volunteers, began distributing (just) clothing in a \$50/month basement storage room in a local Wallingford Church. Fast forward to today, Master's Manna, Inc. is a licensed, non-profit 501(c)3 organization recently relocated to its third location. Within these "new" 5,000 square feet, the Board of Directors, five staff (mostly part time) and a cadre of dozens of committed compassionate volunteers assist those who struggle with food insecurity, unemployment and homelessness. We serve over 2.5% of Wallingford's residents! Additionally, we serve all the towns whose borders abut border Wallingford (mostly Meriden). Our core offerings of food, meals and healthcare are supplied at no cost - without exception.

Our goal has always been to provide "a hand up / not a hand-out". We do this by offering our facility as a Resource Center to help local residents get back on their feet-typically after experiencing a setback: unemployment, reduced work hours, family illness, unexpected bills, and numerous other life challenges that can quickly make the difference between "making it" or NOT.

It is very inspiring to see local residents regain their footing in life and discontinue using Master's Manna services. Many of those we serve are so positively impacted that they become regular volunteers to "pass it forward."

We learned early on that one of the challenges when the "chips are down" is to be effective with time when there is so much to do - especially when there are children and dependent adults present in the household. And, of course, it gets a lot harder when a household has only one breadwinner and multiple dependents. Therefore, Master's Manna endeavors to offer as many support services as possible when registered "shoppers" come to our facility.

Master's Manna provides food shopping, a marketplace, and meals in our Family Dining Area along with additional resources four days a week. Between 400 & 450 family groups are served EACH WEEK. This statistic usually shocks most of our visitors. It is, however, an easy figure to confirm as each "shopper" or client registers for services prior to their first food shopping appointment. In order to operate efficiently, food shopping and marketplace shopping are only available to those registered, and only by appointment.

Our food pantry is set up like a supermarket. Unlike many food pantries where each family receives the same box or bag of selected non-perishable items, Master's Manna is a food pantry of "choice." Our shoppers select the foods that they need for several reasons.

Primarily, we want families to take food that suits their needs (including dietary). It sounds simple ... but by providing foods of choice - they are eaten and enjoyed - not thrown away.

Additionally, as nutritious foods are costly, families in need often cut back on protein-based foods, fresh fruit and vegetables etcetera, the very foods that are necessary to keep them healthy and able to support themselves. At Master's Manna, the focus is on supplying as many of these important food groups as possible. When local community groups offer to do food drives (for which we are deeply grateful), the focus is on healthy foods: meat, fresh fruits and vegetables, dairy and high protein canned meals.

We distribute 400-450 boxes of cereal EVERY WEEK (when we have them). A bowl of cereal is a "safe" meal that can be prepared by children either as a meal or an after-school snack; or as a meal for the elderly. Cereal requires no cooking or microwave heating. While we prefer to provide high quality nutritious cereals, we can only offer those food items that are donated, collected through food drives-or-by food reclamation. Master's Manna delivers to Wallingford residents who are homebound with the kind support service provided by Ben Haven School and Ice-T students.

Lastly, we consistently hear one of the biggest challenges when one is "down on one's luck" is the lack of respect within the community. At Master's Manna, an escort/volunteer assists shoppers as they select their own food. Escorts/volunteers offer key support to help rebuild confidence and independence and reduce isolation – a huge issue for so many. This support also enables shoppers to regain their footing and achieve our mutual goal - to discontinue the need of our services and support.

Master's Manna is an organization where mutual respect exists between everyone who crosses the threshold. Every person who enters the front doors is both welcomed and encouraged. Visitors are often surprised by the focused energy and warm supportive spirit throughout every area of our facility-it is very much a family atmosphere. As a long established organization, we are deeply grateful to the local community, corporations, individuals, agencies and funders who have supported Master's Manna and continue to provide us with the needed resources and support.

Master's Manna is fully aware that we certainly cannot supply all the needed food for each family-we simply do the best we can regardless of family size. This means that we must constantly scout available resources for as much food as possible. Presently, 22 TONS of food are distributed each month to the shoppers/clients. Of these, over 50% are Wallingford residents. Our goal is to have 26 tons per month for our shoppers over the next 12 months.

In parallel with the food pantry, nutritious hot meals, freshly prepared in commercial kitchen, are available in the Family Dining Area three days a week during the hectic 4-hour shopping periods. Meals are available to all



- no registration is needed. Depending on the hour and day, we offer full breakfasts, lunches and (on Wednesday evening) dinner. EVERYONE is welcome. We especially like to invite guests on Wednesdays between 3:00 and 6:30 pm for my favorite, the full hot dinner. At that time, you are likely to see literally dozens of people moving around our building. We've rarely served the same meal twice.

Our building is a former restaurant on South Cherry Street - just off John Street. While the Family Dining Area is an old bar (we never serve alcohol), it does provide a warm comfortable atmosphere. The coffee pots are hot and available five days a week. Often, there are pastries etc. by the cold drinks table. Our dining tables can be moved to configurations that suit larger families or groups of new friends who gather over a warm meal. Reservations are not needed - but some shoppers like to make them anyway. Our amazing Chef Sue C and volunteer staff prepare and serve several hundred meals monthly (a steadily increasing number). Our Family Dining Area motto/mantra is:
"Everyone deserves a good meal! "

Another essential basic need addressed is Healthcare. CHC, the Community Health Center, a Statewide organization, offers medical visits to our clients and shoppers two days a week. The CHC also provides a Counselor for mental health care visits two days a week as well. CHC has a brand new dedicated area for medical care. While appointments are required, there is no need for advance registration. We wish we could offer medical care visits coinciding with food shopping and meals, but our parking needs are limited. The Board searched hard for a new facility for three years to locate a cost-effective commercial rental. While we need 60 parking spaces at peak times, we settled for just 35, due to the limited number of Wallingford properties with more than just 10 spaces. Prudently scheduling activities at our facility is mandatory.

The Marketplace is the final "service area." Ever-changing Clothing is available to registered shoppers and qualified volunteers. We are fortunate to receive in excess of TWO TONS of clothing monthly from donations. Our two teams of regular volunteers work tirelessly to sort and arrange donated clothing. Once again, our shoppers select what they and their families will actually use. Clothing usually comes from household donors. Due to space constraints, we can only accept clothing in season. We can always use more men's clothing.

Our commitment is to be as much of a single one-stop "Resource Center" as possible. It's always disturbing to hear our shoppers say they cannot afford to drive short distances due to the cost of partially filling their gas tanks. Of course, that is, if they own and support a car at all.

Based on the above, we are often asked if we are taken advantage of -- a fair question. The short answer is "only occasionally." There are very few people whose goal is to register and utilize a Food Pantry and Resource Center, unless true need exists. Of those we support, the overall behavior and mentality are remarkably humble. One's eyes water when a food item is offered to a shopper who then says "no thank you, I don't need it, and don't want to take it from somebody who does." At Master's Manna the vast majority contribute in spirit in every way possible, regardless of why we all come through the door. Of the over 2,500 shoppers, those who abuse the system are absolutely minimal in number.

Of course, another question we are often asked is, "Where do these tons of food and clothing come from?" Our food comes from multiple major sources like the Connecticut Food Bank (located in Wallingford). As one of the largest Food Pantries in the State, we are the largest recipient of food from the Connecticut Food Bank, some of which is purchased, some of which is donated. Many of the major Big Box stores, such as Stop-and-Shop, BigY, WalMart, & BJ's, donate significant quantities of food. Then there are smaller stores like East Side and West Side markets, and the numerous local farms, etcetera. Master's Manna is also enormously grateful to the dozens of community groups and individuals who contribute food. It may be a Middle School doing

a cereal or food drive and donating hundreds of boxes, a Church Food Drive; or a Company's online employee campaign.

One of our overall favorites is when an elementary school student decides to forgo birthday presents and instead asks family and friends to bring non-perishable foods. These families arrive with hundreds of pounds of food. Like us, they are overjoyed when they see their food weighed on our commercial scale (especially when they stand on the scale too). We frequently post photos of Donors (of all ages) on our Website and Facebook page. Search for "Master's Manna Food Pantry and Resource Center." or www.mastersmanna.org

Donations of non-perishable food and clothing are welcomed at the warehouse side door 9 a.m. to 12 noon, Monday through Friday. Tax Receipts are always available. Master's Manna provides so much more to those who have "hit bottom". In addition to the resources of a warm meal, an outfit for an interview, laundry facilities (2 loads allowed per week) and food for a shopper's home pantry shelves, Master's Manna offers HOPE. Within two or three visits tears are often returned to smiles and lives ARE improved. At Master's Manna we believe, as stated by Bill Pappas, a former Board Director and mentor, that **"Food is Not an Option!"**. A community that is well fed and healthy is not only a better community but a safer community. So ~

"Let's Build a Stronger Community ~ Together"

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