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GENA CANNING



HEATHER SANBORN

WOMEN TO WATCH

Mainebiz is proud to present the 2015 Women to Watch. This year's honorees have shown the skill, tenacity and smarts to make a difference not only at their own companies or organizations, but in their particular industries as well. Maine is the stronger for their efforts. We think you'll enjoy their stories.



LOIS SKILLINGS



KRISTEN MIALE



Kristen Miale, president of Good Shepherd Food Bank, Maine's largest food provider. She's pictured in the food bank's Auburn warehouse.

PHOTO / WILLIAM TREVASKIS

WOMEN TO WATCH

NONPROFIT

Kristen Miale

President

Good Shepherd Food Bank

Good Shepherd Food Bank

3121 Hotel Road, Auburn

Founded: 1981

President: Kristen Miale

Service: Hunger relief and food distribution

Employees: 62 (mostly full-time)

Revenue (2014): \$35 million

Contact: www.gsfb.org | 782-3554

Feeding the hungry

BY LORI VALIGRA

Kristen Miale points excitedly to the small stack of boxed Backyard Farms tomatoes left in the refrigerator case at day's end, noting that in the morning the boxes of food stretched from floor to ceiling.

"They're our third-largest donor," Miale enthuses, adding that Hannaford is first and Walmart is second, with the two each contributing millions of pounds of food annually. As energetic outside of work as she is at work, Miale enjoys running, reading and cooking.

As we walk through the 53,000-square-foot warehouse in Auburn, past box after box filled with dented cans and foods near or past their expiration date — all of which need to be sorted into food groups — Miale relates stories of food insecurity

in Maine, of the thousands of children and adults that go hungry each day and by necessity get creative in preparing even the most meager meals.

"I heard about two people talking in a food pantry about eating pet food, and one said it tasted better on saltines than on Ritz crackers," she says, shaking her head. "It's sad that conversation ever had to take place."

A 2014 study by Good Shepherd Food Bank and Feeding America found that one in seven Mainers, or some 178,000 people, turn to Maine food pantries and meal service programs to feed themselves and their families.

The food crisis hit closest to home for Miale when she first became the food bank's president and discovered some of

her own staff went to a food pantry after work to get their own food. She says that now, every hourly employee makes more than 50% above minimum wage.

Miale pulls a can out of a box and runs her finger carefully over the edge of a dent. “This one is good. If the dent has a point, we have to throw it out.” That’s because the point could signal a food safety issue. The food bank rejects about 15% of food it gets, but that generally goes to pig farmers.

She adds that the majority of food that comes in would otherwise end up in landfills. The food bank also gets some pet food and personal care products.

Feeding thousands

Good Shepherd Food Bank, founded in 1981, is Maine’s largest food provider and part of Feeding America, a nationwide network of food banks. The Good Shepherd Food Bank handles 23 million pounds of donated and purchased food each year that it distributes to 400 food pantries, food banks and homeless shelters in Maine. That translates into 20 million meals a year.

“We are their grocery store,” says Miale, who took over as president in October 2012. Last year, the food bank bought 1 million pounds of Maine-grown food and farmers donated another 1 million.

Miale says on a typical day, she spends half her time raising money. “I’m a very analytical person,” she says. “The food bank needed that.”

She said the food bank needed to better understand its cost structure, including the transportation fees to truck the food to pantries. Fuel costs for its nine trucks alone come to \$18,000 a month, not to mention paying the drivers.

Good Shepherd Food Bank’s revenues in 2014 were \$35.1 million, with donated food comprising \$28.1 million of that. The remaining revenue and support comes from contributions from private donors, agency fees (charges to organizations buying food), grants, in-kind contributions and other sources.

Expenses for 2014 at \$35.57 million put the food bank into the red by nearly \$500,000. The major expense is for food distribution, at \$33.9 million. The decrease in net assets was due primarily to annual fluctuations in food inventory at its warehouses in Auburn, Biddeford and Brewer.

Miale is working to streamline operations while expanding facilities and bringing in more nutritional food. In January, the food bank received a \$1 million grant from

Next Generation Foundation of Maine for upgrades to the Auburn distribution center, including building an 115,000-cubic-foot produce storage facility with multiple zones to vary temperatures and humidity levels.

An avid cook, Miale says that since she took over she has focused on more nutritional food and a commitment to equity in food distribution. Before, a “pull” system was in place: food pantries lined up and took food on a first come, first served basis.

Now, the food bank is transitioning to a push model in which a full needs assessment for each pantry will be made. It is part of a change in August to a 100% online ordering process. That way, certain products, like meat, can be allocated. “We’re working to look at how much food is distributed versus the need for it at a certain location,” Miale says.

The food bank also is expanding its community partners. Traditionally, most food pantries were affiliated with a church, but she now has partnered with more than 100 schools and community colleges. That helps working parents get to the pantry when it is open and encourages communication between parents and teachers. The next frontier is partnering with healthcare organizations, she says.

Dixie Shaw, program director of hunger and relief services at Catholic Charities in Caribou, sees a lot of positive outcomes since Miale took over. “I really like Kristen. She’s what the Good Shepherd Food Bank needed for a long time,” says Shaw. “She brings energy and passion and understands the needs of a food pantry. She sets the tone for the organization.”

Shaw adds that she can call Miale with any concern. “She’s reachable, listens and responds. She makes you feel like part of the team, like you’re important,” Shaw says.

Misperceptions

Miale says many people who come to food pantries are working and not just showing up for a handout. And for many, walking through the door to ask for help is a milestone. She related the story of one woman who walked up to the door of the Preble Street food pantry with her three children several days in a row before finally coming inside.

“When you volunteer at a food pantry, so many people who come in feel the need to explain why they’re there,” she says.

Food insecurity, or hunger, is not having regular access to the food you need to live a healthy life, says Miale. She has focused on

In her own words

What was the biggest challenge of your career?

To get people to see the broader picture of the food system. It’s not just filling bellies today. It’s looking at long-term solutions to hunger.

When did you know you’d made it?

I haven’t made it yet. I’ll feel like I have when the work I’m part of has a long-standing, meaningful impact. I still feel like we’re on a hamster wheel chasing the need rather than being out in front of it.

What advice do you wish you’d gotten early in your career?

It’s advice from David Shaw [IDEXX founder and former employer] who said you don’t have to have all the answers to stick your neck out and be part of the solution. You have to have passion and the willingness to try and fail.

I’ll relax when...?

Not until anyone who has the desire, has the opportunity to live the life they want to live.

What was your ‘Haven’t we gone beyond this’ moment?

One year ago people were waiting in line with their own boxes at the food pantry in Alfred, in York County, one of the wealthiest counties in Maine.



Kristen Miale said the food crisis hit home when she realized her own staff was heading to food pantries after work.

healthy food since taking over as president, opting for low-salt soups, gluten-free noodles, fresh produce and whole wheat-based pasta. Of the 23 million pounds of foods the food pantry handles in a year, 40% is perishable, meaning it is frozen or has to be refrigerated. Another 30% is fresh produce and the rest is boxed or canned goods. “Five years ago it was 5% produce,” she said.

Education is key

Before becoming president, she was running Cooking Matters, hands-on cooking and nutrition classes for low-income people at risk for hunger. She started it and brought it under the umbrella of the Good Shepherd Food Bank.

“I was disheartened by the unhealthy food being given to people who are unhealthy,” she says, remembering volunteer work at food pantries. She tells of one woman who, when offered a bag of fresh potatoes, asked what they were.

That’s when Miale started Cooking Matters. She pulled in a couple large grants from Hannaford and then approached the Good Shepherd Food Bank in 2010 to take the program in-house. Cooking Matters’ 300 classes this year reached 3,000 people.

Prior to entering the nonprofit world, she was a financial analyst and business consultant. She worked for Black Point Group, a Portland-based private investment partnership run by IDEXX founder David Shaw and his son Ben Shaw, who is founder and CEO of Direct Vet Marketing Inc. Miale holds an MBA from Boston University and a Bachelor of Science in computer science from Boston College.

“I loved working with the Shaws,” Miale says. “It was intellectually challenging. I loved the work, but I didn’t love passing money around to the same [wealthy] people.”

Miale, a New Hampshire native, describes her upbringing as middle class, with her father being an engineer and her mother a homemaker. “They came from families of meager means and worked hard.”

She says she wanted to feel like she was contributing more, and initially took a 50% cut in pay when she joined Good Shepherd Food Bank.

Says Miale, “Cooking well is important to me.”

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