



# HARVESTERS IS THE SOLUTION



## An \$11.5 Million Capital Campaign by Harvesters – The Community Food Network to Better Serve Those Hungry and in Need in Kansas City

**I**t may be difficult for some people to believe that hunger still exists in our nation. Yet, in Kansas and Missouri alone, over 280,000 families live at risk of hunger. They are families facing financial challenges due to an illness or unexpected crisis; they are families either unemployed or underemployed. They are children. Sadly, the risk of hunger among children is even greater than that of any other demographic.

These less fortunate individuals are the reason that Harvesters — The Community Food Network of Kansas City, Missouri partners with over 550 other charitable agencies to provide nutritious food and necessary household products to those who need them most — the sick, the elderly, young children and struggling families. At the same time, Harvesters offers emergency relief for victims of disasters such as fires, floods and tornadoes.

Harvesters collects and distributes food — canned and dry goods, fresh produce and other perishables donated from the food industry, food drives and individuals as well as prepared food from area restaurants, hospitals and corporate cafeterias that would have otherwise gone to waste. From its warehouse in Kansas City, Harvesters supplies food for a wide variety of agencies and organizations, such as senior centers, day cares, domestic abuse facilities and emergency food pantries. These groups rely on Harvesters to provide them with the food that they, in turn, distribute to their clients. Money saved through the “rescue and reuse” of the food collected allows area nonprofits to use their money on programs and services rather than on food and basic household products.

### **From Nuisance to Need**

As Kansas City’s only food bank, Harvesters’ warehouse and offices served at capacity for years. Every square inch was being used to the fullest. Boxes were stacked upon boxes and moving products from place to place was almost a full-time job for volunteers. Not only were they stretching and multi-tasking their 42,000 square-foot warehouse to the limit, but the organization also was forced to rent an additional 33,000 square-foot off-site storage area to keep up with donations. The “satellite storage” was inconvenient to manage at a distance and costly to run. Harvesters’ lack of space quickly changed from a growing nuisance to a truly desperate need.

Said Harvesters’ Executive Director Karen Haren, “We knew we needed a larger facility and soon. We knew this would mean undergoing a capital campaign. We started looking for land where we could build just what we needed, but we also were open to the possibility of renovating an existing building — if we could find one that worked for our purposes. We needed enough space to bring all of our food and household products together in one central location and to provide a large, refrigerated area for perishable items. We wanted at least 12 drive-up docks for loading and unloading, sufficient offices, and, in order to be accessible to the people we served, we needed to have ample parking and to be located on a bus route.”

Bob Hartsook, Chairman and CEO of Hartsook Companies — a national fundraising consulting firm with significant experience in Kansas City — encouraged Harvesters to plan thoroughly before the campaign ever got underway. As a result, the staff and Board first developed a campaign steering committee and initiated the silent phase of its \$11.5 million capital campaign. “With Bob’s help, we trained our Board and volunteers before sending them out on solicitation appointments,” Haren recalls. She went along on virtually every visit, accompanied by another team member — someone with a connection to the donor. “One person had the relationship with the donor and I went along as the resource person to help answer questions and offer detailed information.”

Haren understood that undertaking a capital campaign of this magnitude was going to be a lot of work. Wisely, she made plans for the busy season ahead. “I knew I would have to commit huge amounts of time to the campaign, so I intentionally prepared the rest of the organization. Every staff member took on new and expanded roles and responsibilities. Because of the preparation and



organizational planning we did prior to the campaign, our staff is now at the strongest level ever. Everyone is in the right place, doing the right job.

“We learned two important lessons by going through this campaign process: One, it’s not about the building. You hear that message again and again from fundraisers, but we really saw the truth of it firsthand. It’s about enabling the organization to fulfill its mission. Two, it’s very important to do your homework before you go into a solicitation appointment. We did an enormous amount of research and fact gathering so we would be thoroughly prepared to answer donors’ questions about the cost effectiveness of different decisions, the economic impact of our organization in the community and anything else that might come up in a conversation. We always went in prepared. We made sure we knew as much as we could, about as many subjects as we could, on any subject related to our campaign. We looked ahead and thought things through, and as a result, we become experts at telling our story.”

Said Harvesters’ Director of Fund Development Joanna Sebelien, “Bob kept us focused and on track and gave us the strategies we needed, as staff and volunteer leadership, to make our solicitations as successful as possible.”

Board members understood that agreeing to undertake the campaign also meant they would be expected to give; and they did — with 100 percent participation. As it turned out, most of the campaign remained in the “silent phase.” Nearly \$8 million dollars was raised before going public. The Hall Family Foundation made the campaign’s lead gift of \$1.5 million. A \$1 million challenge grant from the J.E. and L.E. Mabee Foundation and a \$750,000 Kresge grant followed.



## Finding a Home for Harvesters

When considering the kind of building they would need, Harvesters’ Board and staff did not start with an unreasonable campaign “wish list.” Everything on the list was essential to adequately serve agencies and families in the area. At the same time, however, they were realistic about the challenge of finding such a place without having to build something from the ground up. This is why, when they received a call about a computer assembly warehouse sitting idle, they never expected it would meet, and in some cases exceed, so many of their needs.

The building, which had been vacant for a couple of years, was about 20 percent larger than they had hoped for. Since the warehouse had been on the market for a while, the owners were eager to sell. A quick reconfiguration of existing space required less time than new construction. Harvesters was able to bring everything under one roof and save money on rental space. The new location provided room for 16 docks (versus the 12 on their initial wish list) and was configured with plenty of office space, something unique for a warehouse.

“We sold the building we owned and purchased the 216,000 square-foot warehouse located on 11 acres. It had everything we needed except refrigeration,” said Haren. “We expanded the space and added a 20,000 square-foot refrigerated area.” But even with this significant adaptation, they knew they had found the perfect place for fulfilling the organization’s mission.



## Pushing Through Plight and Plateau

In spite of their great fortune in finding a perfect location, their timing was not as opportune. “We launched our campaign just prior to 9/11,” said Haren. When the events of that day occurred, Harvesters had to do some serious soul searching and decision making.



“After thinking things through, we concluded that the needs in our community had not changed. If anything, 9/11 highlighted our need to be prepared for an uncertain future. Did we really have any other choice but to move forward with the campaign? For us, the answer was clear — keep going. During this pivotal decision-making time, Bob was our biggest encourager. He kept us focused and on track when other nonprofits were calling off their campaigns. Not only did he help us strategize, he coached us from beginning to end.”

Although September 11th failed to bring the campaign to a halt, the effects of that difficult period played a role in bringing about a typical campaign plateau. Said Haren, “Our plateau came soon after we had raised about \$3.2 million. We were at that number for nearly a year, but we never quit doing what needed to be done — making calls, scheduling solicitation appointments, asking for gifts.”

What they realized through this season was that you can and should make timelines for your own efforts, but you cannot make timelines for donors to give. Some requests came back immediately, but many lingered for a very long time. “It wasn’t that people were saying ‘no,’ they just weren’t saying ‘yes,’” said Haren.

With the stock market plummeting and people still adjusting to a post-9/11 world, there was somewhat of a slow-motion effect among donors. They were not as quick to write a check, but they were still strongly supportive of Harvesters. “We knew the reality of the situation and that the need for food in our community had not decreased. We saw no other option but to keep asking for money.” Before long, their perseverance began to pay off...again.

“The staff and volunteers of Harvesters were committed to making this happen,” said Hartsook. “They understood what others seemed to not appreciate — the power of commitment. From top to bottom they were focused on serving those who are hungry.”

### Million Dollar Motivator

Although the Mabee challenge came right down to the wire, the \$1 million grant was a great motivator to ask for major gifts. “We had many asks still unanswered but enough donors eventually came around within a few weeks of our grant deadline,” said Haren.

The campaign invited gifts from individuals and foundations alike. Close to the end of the campaign, Harvesters received \$2 million in government support in the form of Missouri Development Financial Board (MDFB) tax credits and a gift from Housing and Urban Development (HUD) through the City of Kansas City, Missouri as a Community Development Block Grant.

Offered Harvesters’ former Capital Campaign Manager Meg Godderz, “Without the MDFB tax credits, which stimulated over \$1 million in gifts, we would have had a difficult time meeting the Mabee challenge grant. We had six weeks to distribute the tax credits and make Mabee’s deadline. Our steering committee was excellent. While staff provided names and numbers, volunteers made most of the calls. We spoke with previous donors to let them know about the credits. We also ran ads in *The Kansas City Business Journal* and *The Independent* and pursued new leads. A capital campaign should not be too staff-driven. You really need motivated, empowered volunteers for a successful campaign. They know the prospects personally; they have the valuable connections, we just provided the resources to help them. Throughout the campaign, it was Bob Hartsook’s advice and counsel that made the difference — especially with the Kresge and Mabee foundations. His guidance was indispensable.”

Once the campaign had reached its goal, Haren found herself a little nostalgic about the whole process. “I actually miss the project. I really enjoyed giving people a chance to make a difference. It was exciting and scary, but I found that I really liked fundraising. Since we were regularly out there telling our story, we had a lot of donors come forward and either give for the first time or give at an increased level.”

“Harvesters is the Solution,” a capital campaign for Harvesters — The Community Food Network, increased the organization’s visibility in the community but more importantly, it increased the organization’s ability to fulfill its mission. In fact, in the fiscal year following the opening of the new warehouse, Harvesters was able to increase its annual distribution from 19 to 25 million pounds of food. Through this successful campaign, fewer go hungry each day.

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*About the Consultant* — Robert F. Hartsook, JD, EdD, Chairman and CEO, has been a fundraising professional for more than 25 years. He has helped countless nonprofit organizations in social services, youth services, higher education, the arts, museums and healthcare raise millions of dollars as they seek to expand and improve services for their clients. Bob is a speaker in high demand and an author of six books on fundraising and countless articles. Bob can be reached at [bob@hartsookcompanies.com](mailto:bob@hartsookcompanies.com).

*About Hartsook Companies, Inc.* — Hartsook Companies, Inc., has served nonprofits nationwide with capital, endowment and annual campaigns; leadership support; board training; marketing and more since 1987. The firm has conducted more than 1,700 campaigns ranging from \$500,000 to more than \$1 billion. The web site: [www.hartsookcompanies.com](http://www.hartsookcompanies.com).

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