



## *VHC Newsletter 4 November 2020*

### **Hunger in Pioneer Valley Is All Around Us – How You Can Help**

**By Susan Hogan**



Most weekday mornings I can be found sitting in my car in line behind the Walter Salvo House on Conz Avenue. Down a short alley called Butch McConnell Way is a set of glass doors which leads to an industrial kitchen. This kitchen supplies roughly 500 meals per day to elderly residents in

Florence, Northampton, Leeds, Williamsburg and Easthampton.

The sponsoring organization, Meals on Wheels, which I volunteer with, operates under the auspices of Highland Valley Elder Services, based in Amherst. To qualify for meals, participants must have incomes below a certain level and health problems that prevent them from shopping and cooking.

Those participants seem glad to see us volunteers. When I visit, I notice that some clients don't even respond to the apartment door buzzer; instead, they come rushing down the steps to meet me. Others sit in wheelchairs or in front of their televisions, with a nearby walker for mobility. Although some clients live in senior housing, most have subsidized apartments in middle-income buildings.

I deliver between 10 and 15 meals each morning. Some of the volunteers who have been involved in Meals on Wheels for years deliver about double that each day.

One of the two bags I carry contains the hot meal. The small plastic tray holding it is divided into sections, and the food is shrink-wrapped. The other bag contains ice and small cartons of 1 percent milk. I have noticed that the milk cartons are near their expiration dates. That bothers me a bit.

Still, I comply with the big sign at the kitchen that says I am required to deliver the milk to clients whether they want it or not. One of my clients refuses the milk, so I give two cartons to another person, who receives it happily. I know this is against regulations but it works out well for the parties, especially me. I don't have to argue with my elderly client and the milk isn't wasted. In addition, I have been told that anything I bring back to the kitchen at the end of my route will be thrown out, and I wouldn't want to see that.

Next, there's the matter of the food itself. It's not always so appetizing, but there are good days here and there. Yesterday, for instance, the meal was fish sticks and I was glad to deliver it, because I like fish sticks and tartar sauce! But I was half-way through my home visits before I first noticed the plastic bag containing small packs of tartar sauce. I felt really bad because this was food I appreciated. More often than not, the meals I deliver look like the government-surplus stuff I used to find in school lunchrooms. You know what I mean: processed food, uniformly shaped and often breaded. School lunches were something I spent a great deal of my time avoiding.

Since I started volunteering meals six weeks ago, I have delivered Salisbury steak, Yankee pot roast, BBQ chicken, Philly cheese steak, roast pork, ravioli and chicken pot pie. Each meal has contained animal protein. Dessert has usually been a piece of fruit, a cookie or canned fruit. The smell of the meals? Another reminder of those school lunchrooms.

Still, the reactions of my clients make the down sides worth it. On my first day, some asked, "What happened to the other person?" But once they got used to me, they all seemed grateful and most became friendly and warm. They expect me and at times I am the only contact they seem to have with the outside world. Recently, L., one of my clients, said after I brought in her meal and mail, "I like you; be safe out there." That made my day!

Meals on Wheels began in the United States in 1954 and delivers mostly lunches to about three million people. The program has been very beneficial for many seniors who experience food insecurity. Although in 2017 President Trump proposed cutting its budget, the program survived unscathed. Today's funding for Meals on Wheels is a complex formula, with roughly 70 percent of its funding coming from the federal government. The rest is made up of private donations.

The Amherst Survival Center and the Northampton Survival Center offer food at their food pantries, and Greenfield has an organization called The Center for Self Reliance. According to recent data available at [FeedingAmerica.org](http://FeedingAmerica.org), 10.1 percent of Hampshire County residents (15,970) are food insecure. There have been some local attempts to deliver food to people's homes but none of these organizations is able to provide daily hot meals the way Meals on Wheels does.

Fortunately, the program has also continued to serve meals through the pandemic.

Since I retired four years ago, I have consistently been involved in some sort of volunteer work. I spent part of July 2019 refilling water drops in the South Texas desert to help refugees crossing the border avoid the Border Control and stay hydrated in that hot, grueling environment. In addition I have tutored women from Somali and mentored high school students from Nepal.

These were all rewarding experiences but Meals on Wheels provides me something additional: I meet the neighbors I serve; I listen to their stories. And I'm heartened that they seem to look forward to my arrival and already greet me by name. Increasingly, I look forward to seeing them, too.

## How You Can Help Fight Hunger in Pioneer Valley



### The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts

**About:** The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts, located in Hatfield, has been active since 1982, distributing food to its member hunger food pantries in Berkshire, Franklin, Hampden and Hampshire counties. The food bank helps feed 90,000 people a month. Packing and sorting is a large part of volunteer work. To volunteer, you'll need to complete a volunteer orientation. Here's how to [contact the Food Bank](#).



### RSVP

**About:** RSVP is the volunteer connector for people 55 and over in the Pioneer Valley. Anti-hunger groups are among RSVP's programs. Volunteers help the Food Bank and pack meals for brown bag programs as well as work at food pantries. Here's how to [contact RSVP](#).

## Northampton Survival Center



**About:** Located at 265 Prospect Street in Northampton as well as in Goshen, the Survival Center provides low-income residents of the community with an assortment of nutritionally balanced groceries once a month. Each weekday, volunteers help between 25 and 50 families select their food, produce and personal care items. Volunteers also stock pantry shelves and pick up and conduct quality control on community-donated food. Orientations have been suspended due to Covid. Here's how to [contact the Survival Center.](#)

## Grow Food Northampton



**About:** Grow Food Northampton aims to promote food security by advancing sustainable agriculture in the Northampton area. The project's programs include a community farm, community garden and food distribution through the Survival Center. Volunteers are invited to fill out a volunteer form online. Here's how [to contact Grow Food Northampton.](#)

## MANNA Soup Kitchen



**About:** MANNA Soup Kitchen is a Northampton-based nonprofit organization that provides hot, nutritious meals in a safe and hospitable setting where guests can find warmth and fellowship and be treated with respect. MANNA has an interfaith Board of Directors dedicated to sustaining this effort and operates out of Edwards Church, St. John's Church and other locations. Here's [how to contact MANNA.](#)

## Sustainability

### What Does ‘Recycling’ Actually Mean? Depends Where You Live.

By Mark Schlack



As we all migrate toward a cohesive Village Hill Cohousing community, one thing to notice is that “recycling” takes on different forms depending on where you live. In other words, what you did in your former hometown or city will likely be at least slightly different from what Northampton does.

That’s because municipal recycling depends on two aspects: what’s technically recyclable and what a city’s or town’s recycling contractor is able to economically process. That process mostly revolves around which plastics in which forms can be recycled, although it can affect paper goods, glass and metals as well.

## **What You Need to Know About Plastics**

All plastics carrying the familiar rounded triangle symbol are technically recyclable. But plastic is typically one of seven types: 1) polyester terephthalate (PET); 2) high density polyethylene; 3) polyvinyl chloride (PVC); 4) low density polyethylene; 5) polypropylene; 6) polystyrene; and 7) other varieties.

Each of the seven major types has its individual challenges. The plastics listed above as “other varieties” often contain multiple polymers and are generally a lost cause for recycling, as is PVC. There are many other commonly used plastics that are not even included here. But ultimately what all of these challenges boil down to is the cost of processing or the lack of a market for the reprocessed material. Towns generally contract with a company that does the processing and sells it on, and each company and locale has its own requirements and constraints.

### **The Special Case of Polystyrene**

Northampton is typical in refusing all polystyrene, which is found in foamed packaging, packaging materials like those awful packing peanuts, and some plastic utensils.

Polystyrene is also just too cheap to buy new for manufacturers to bother with recycling. Another verboten category is plastic bags and wrap – thin stuff which requires dedicated processing machinery that raises the cost. Clear clamshell trays that might hold your take-out food are generally okay, but the black ones (usually polypropylene or PP) are a problem, probably because their colorant affects their recyclability.

Many other things are not recyclable in Northampton, but in terms of plastics, those getting a thumbs-up include food containers, beverage bottles, detergent and personal-care containers. The safest bets are PE and PET bottles, both of which have well-established recycling markets.

Want to find out more? Northampton offers [information online](#). And there are things members can do to encourage businesses to increase recycling. One (thanks, Karen Clay) is asking your favorite take-out joints to switch from using black plastic, for example. If you have other ideas, the Sustainability Group would love to hear your thoughts for actions that we as individual or as a community can pursue.

## Recommended

### Film: Welcome to Chechnya

*Directed by David France. HBO Max/Public Square Films*

**By Craig Machado**



I had read about the brutal crackdown on GLBTQ+ people in the very repressive Russian state of Chechnya (where a long and destructive war against Russian occupation resulted in a stalemate, and then a peace treaty). Today, Chechnya is led by former militia leader Ramzan Kadyrov. But until Dick and I watched *Welcome to Chechnya*, we had no idea what these events have really meant for Chechnyans caught, imprisoned and often tortured for their sexual identity.

We watched this HBO documentary through the OUT-FILM CT annual festival of film, but it's also streaming on the subscription HBO Max platform. The OUT festival has been running for 33 consecutive years, bringing a variety of shorts, documentaries and full-length films to the LGBTQ+ community and its friends.

In thinking about the film, I find it ironic -- but probably not surprising -- that Chechnya, a mostly Muslim country that's long struggled against foreign domination and has tried to assert its political freedom, would go after a certain group of its own people, forcing them to hide, leave, or be killed.

Just look at the leaders in that part of the world: Kadyrov and Russian President Vladimir Putin. Both are autocratic, nationalistic and fervent believers in their respective religions, Orthodox Christianity and Islam, neither of which is at all friendly to LGBTQ people. In fact, Kadyrov stated in a July 2017 interview on HBO TV Network that, "We don't have those kinds of people here. We don't have any gays."

The film focuses on a group of dedicated activists, based in Moscow, who work to get LGBTQ people out of Chechnya. Through sophisticated "deep fake" technology, the filmmaker David France (*How to Survive a Plague*) and his crew were able to morph the faces of their subjects so they could not be identified but could be hopefully rescued.

Only toward the end of the film do we see the real face of a man named Maxim, the film's main focus, as he and his entire family are flown to safety in an unnamed Western European country. Maxim then decides that he will return to Moscow and file charges against the Chechnyan officials responsible for the false arrests and crimes of torture and murder being waged against LGBTQ persons.

In an empty Moscow courtroom, a sole judge enters and reads a terse statement rejecting Maxim's charges. Justice denied.

So, Russia has hardly stepped up. Instead, most of those getting out of Chechnya are being helped by Canada's "Rainbow Railroad," which to date has resettled several hundred Chechens. The Trump administration has taken none of them.

In documenting these wrongs, *Welcome to Chechnya* is a superb film as well as a disturbing reminder of the extent of cruelty and bigotry in the 21st century. But it also shows that a few brave, dedicated people who put themselves at great risk are willing to save others from unspeakable harm. This is a story, unfortunately, that humanity needs to hear again and again.

## **Article: How a 'Buy Local' Activist Is Suddenly Trending Again**



[Shop Local? Buy Organic? An Activist's Call From the '70s Carries New Urgency](#)  
-- By Damien Cave, *New York Times*, Oct. 9

## The Great Outdoors



**Autumn's awesomeness at Village Hill Cohousing**

## Communing with Nature: Area Hikes That Make That Possible

By Deborah Schifter



Deborah enjoying the views at the top of Mt. Skinner

I've got to tell you how grateful I am that in this pandemic era I live in the Pioneer Valley. Easy access to many beautiful outdoor areas affords us all the possibility of safe socializing. I know that for me, it's provided a much-needed antidote to isolation and distressing news.

Just as great is the fact that by living at Village Hill Cohousing, we don't need to go far. Abutting our community are acres and acres of conservation land, with trails that take you

through the woods, along the Mill River and by open fields. Commonly referred to as the “Dog Park” for all the dogs regularly walked there, this segment of the great outdoors is available whether you have 30 minutes between Zoom meetings or hours for long leisurely strolls. Feel like running those trails? Meg and Silas can tell you what that’s like.

If you want a change of scene and are willing to drive, [Fitzgerald Lake Conservation Area](#) (plenty of parking at the end of Cooke Avenue) is a six-minute drive away. Like the Dog Park, it offers flat and easy walking -- and scenery that feels a rather dreamy to me.

[Mineral Hills Conservation Area](#), meanwhile, is a ten-minute drive, and there’s parking at the trailhead on Sylvester Road. Mineral Hills offers a bit more of a cardio workout with a few more hills, though I usually walk it without poles.

If you want a hike that leads to views of the Valley, [Mt. Tom State Reservation](#) (18 minutes away; you can park at the base of the mountain or up top) offers several trails of different levels of challenge. Of course there are plenty of hiking choices farther afield -- all beautiful, all rewarding.

For bike riders, the [Manhan Rail Trail](#) starts at the bottom of Village Hill across 66. The bike path, depending which direction you take, leads to Easthampton and Leeds, or Hadley, Amherst and Belchertown. I prefer taking my bike on the road: When I moved to Massachusetts in 1982, I bought a book of rides in the Pioneer Valley which I still rely on.

Through the years I would sometimes simply look at a map and pick my own back-roads route. A 19-mile favorite starts at Village Hill, goes up into Easthampton past the sculpture garden at Park Hill Orchard, passes through several neighborhoods and then after a stint in the woods along a stream, crosses Route 66 into Westhampton. Along the way you’ll find the [Straw Bale Café](#) (open these for limited hours and just for baked goods by day and pizza by night). Then you’ll ride through more woods before arriving back at VHC. I did that ride recently, and found the foliage vivid and luscious against the bright blue sky.

I’ve also recently gotten into kayaking and can tell you about lovely afternoons on the Swift and Connecticut Rivers. Other VHC members will be able to list great places to go swimming -- I just know they exist.

And of course as winter approaches, there won't be much biking, kayaking, or swimming, but hiking with spikes or snowshoes and cross-country skiing will still work.

As mentioned, all these activities can be done Covid-safely. If you and your friends stay far enough apart, you might agree to take off your masks; just make sure you keep your masks close by to pull on as you pass by others enjoying the outdoors.

## Recipe of the Month

### Toasted Sage Butternut Pizza

Submitted by Melinda Darer, from *FOOD: What the Heck Should I COOK?* by Mark Hyman, MD)



*Just in time for Thanksgiving! A winter squash puree climbs aboard a (gluten-free) cauliflower pizza crust to create a yummy entrée for your T-Day feast.*

#### **Butternut Squash Puree:**

- 1 small butternut squash (about 1 pound)
- 2 Tbsp avocado oil
- 2 Tbsp ghee or coconut oil
- 3 shallots or 1 small onion chopped
- ¼ cup chicken broth or filtered water
- ¼ cup canned coconut cream (unshaken so cream and water are separated)
- 2 cloves garlic, sliced (optional)

**Cauliflower Crust:**

1 medium cauliflower  
3 large pasture-raised eggs  
1 Tbsp Dijon mustard (optional)  
1 tsp dried oregano  
1 – 2 tsp sea salt  
½ - 1 tsp fresh ground black pepper  
2/3 cup almond flour (or 1 cup chickpea flour)

**Toppings:**

2 Tbsp avocado oil  
36 small to medium fresh sage leaves (optional)  
½ cup grated hard sheep or goat cheese (optional)  
¼ cup pepitas  
1 Tbsp raw honey (optional)  
Pinch of Maldon salt or other flaked salt (optional)

1. To roast the squash for the puree: Preheat oven to 425°F. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper. Remove the skin from the squash and chop into small cubes. In a baking dish, toss the squash with the avocado oil; roast for 25 minutes or until browned. Keep the oven on.
2. Meanwhile, for the crust: To rice the cauliflower, remove the outer green leaves, and most of the stem. Chop the remaining cauliflower into medium chunks and pulse in a food processor until it resembles a fine grain. Alternatively, you can grate the cauliflower on a box grater.
3. Whisk the eggs in a small bowl. Add the cauliflower, mustard, oregano, salt, pepper and mix well. Add the almond flour and mix again. Divide the cauliflower mixture between the two baking sheets, forming 2 oval crusts with hands, 1/8 to ¼ inch thick. Bake the cauliflower crusts for 7 minutes. Remove from the oven, flip the crusts, (Note: For ease of flipping crust, lightly oil parchment paper and place on top of a cutting board flip crust and return to baking sheet.) Rotate the baking sheets between the top and bottom oven racks. Bake for another 8 minutes, until golden, then remove from oven but keep the oven on.

4. To finish the squash puree: Heat the ghee or coconut oil in a medium pan until shimmering. Add the shallots or onions and sauté 5 minutes. Add the roasted squash, broth, coconut cream, and garlic. Cook for 2 minutes, until hot. Let cool, then puree in a high-speed blender.
5. For the sage topping: Heat the avocado oil in a small pan. Add the sage leaves and cook for 45 seconds, until aromatic and slightly crisp. Remove from the heat.
6. To top the pizza: Top both crusts with the squash puree, then add the sage leaves, cheese, and pepitas. Bake for 5 minutes, until the cheese is melted. Top the pizzas with the honey and Maldon salt if desired. Bon appétit!

Note: For those days you feel like a more traditional taste: Replace the butternut squash puree with tomato sauce or sliced tomatoes. Add any lightly sautéed vegetables of choice (broccoli, mushrooms, spinach, onions, etc.) and top with favorite cheese if desired.

### And in other breaking news ...



Halloween! Meg, Silas and Jude display a huge arachnid removed from Unit 6. An exterminator has been called.

## Committee Reports

**Work Committee:** Workcom has finalized the procedures for a member's leaving or joining a committee (see Workcom folder on the VHC portal). We are also in the process of determining high-priority work-needs that need to be in place when the Common House opens and when VHC takes over the HOA Board. Part of this process will be each subcommittee's thinking about how its scope and responsibilities will evolve once all units are sold and the community is fully operational. We encourage all committees to begin this process soon. – **Lisa**

**The Marketing Committee** continues to seek a broader, diverse group of prospective members. People should attend and share news of our next Virtual Meet and Greet (formerly known as Happy Hour): Thursday, November 12th, from 6-7 pm EST on Zoom. Please RSVP to [Vhcnoho@gmail.com](mailto:Vhcnoho@gmail.com), and the committee will send you a link the day of the event. Also, please send your brief bios and a photo to [teri@sunwood-builders.com](mailto:teri@sunwood-builders.com) and [chris@sunwood-builders.com](mailto:chris@sunwood-builders.com) to that the website can reflect our most current (and growing) membership. – **Julie**

**The Common House Committee** regards the next few months as crucial for its effort to solicit and purchase furnishings and equipment for the Common House. The committee has compiled a list of priority items that we need to have in place when the building opens and Covid-19 regulations permit us to gather there. We hope to acquire many of the items through donation, but many will also need to be purchased, so the committee has developed a budget to guide our work. By the time you read this, you will have received a list of what we need to gather. Please carefully consider donating these items as you downsize. They will have a beautiful home in our Common House. – **Dick**

**The Governance Committee** has been addressing internal committee matters, including revising aims and assigning roles. – **Eleanor**

**The Finance/Legal Committee** is waiting to hear from the Architectural Accessibility Board about proposal architect Laura Fitch submitted to amend the variance about accessing the Common House basement. In preparation for VHC taking over the HOA board, Fin/Legal has been in touch with other cohousing communities to learn how they structured their HOA budgets. The committee is also looking into hiring a bookkeeper. – **Deborah**

**The Membership Committee** reports that Explorers Jean and John have completed their tasks. These Boston residents list skills in information technology, event planning, advising on solar installation, group facilitation and performing music among the gifts they could bring to VHC.

**Elizabeth** and **Joe** are also Explorers. After her introduction to living-in-community in the Peace Corps after college, Elizabeth helped develop what became Cornerstone Village Cohousing in Cambridge. Although she never took up residence there, she is interested in living with compassion and ecological sustainability with her partner Joe and her college-aged son, **Tyler**, and lists her experiences in sociocracy and non-violent communication as potential contributions to VHC. Joe, describing himself as a person with “stereotypical engineering drive,” sees his contributions as ranging from taking minutes at meetings to using a chainsaw to clear a trail.

Equanimity, a big heart and a desire to contribute to community spirit are attributes **Patricia** says she can offer VHC. She has explored cohousing communities in three states through contacts with friends who live in them. Living in a Buddhist meditation community and group homes provided Patricia insight into the value and challenges of committed group living.

With a life-long commitment to non-violent communication and community action, **Bill** and his wife **Patti** have launched their children and are ready to live “smaller” within a close-knit community where they can contribute in a meaningful way. Experienced in both NVC, Sociocracy and the practice of conflict resolution, Bill and Patti co-chaired a committee at Quaker meeting on marriage, family and relationships. Bill says he has some skill in tech support to contribute, but really hopes to lead astronomy tours. -- **Deborah**

**The IDEA Committee** will be collaborating with the coordinating committee in forming a policy around associate membership. We believe in looking at associate membership through the lens of equity, diversity and inclusion. We have begun the discussion on associate membership being as a key part of VHC’s vision of a diverse community. -- **Maital**

**Happy Thanksgiving!**



