

Second Harvest Food Bank of Middle Tennessee opened in 1978 as a food distribution center which could collect, inspect, sort, and distribute food that would otherwise go to waste. The distribution center now serves over 450 partner agencies in a 46-county area. Second Harvest has developed several programs over the years to address hunger in the area. Emergency food boxes and “backpacks” – bags of food to be placed into children’s backpacks on Friday afternoons to feed them throughout the weekend – are packed and distributed by volunteers at the warehouse. Mobile pantries are another successful way to distribute food. Second Harvest also has a Kids Café program led by a full-time nutritionist to feed children and teach them to make healthy food choices. Through a grocery rescue program through participating corporations, Second Harvest is able to inspect and provide food that would not otherwise be used. They also recently developed Project Preserve which manufactures boil-in-bag, tray pack, or canned meals to be used in disaster relief or sold to partner agencies at reduced cost. Finally, there is a Culinary Arts Center offering catering services and a First Harvest Café where patrons can enjoy a meal while supporting the organization, and the delicious lunches prepared by Chef Mark Rubin was one of the highlights of my time at Second Harvest Food Bank of Middle Tennessee .

When I arrived at Second Harvest, the development department had just moved floors to the main level of the building. It had also recently merged with the marketing department, both departments now falling under the umbrella of External Affairs. They also recently hired a new SVP of External Affairs. With all of these big changes, things were a bit hectic at first, but an intern would be a huge asset to them. The Development Department handles fundraising

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events, major gifts and philanthropy, corporate relations and engagement, grant writing, and more – essentially responsible for getting money through the door in a variety of ways so that Second Harvest’s impact can be as far-reaching as possible. My responsibilities supported the department in these efforts, helping them to run smoothly and efficiently.

One of my biggest on-going projects was to clean up the donor database, Raiser’s Edge. The new SVP wanted everyone to utilize Raiser’s Edge more, but it needed some work to get to that point. I added constituents, actions, and solicitors; made notes of duplicates; and changed addresses and contact information. I also completed several excel projects to aid in this goal, such as updating “do not mail” and deceased lists.

Another important project as a result of the office changes was filing. I sorted through the grant files and removed any that were older than seven years. I then re-filed these in boxes to be archived. While work like this can be tedious, I learned more about grant-writing from reading all the files than from watching the grant-writers work. It was also gratifying to see physical evidence of the work I had been doing. The Director of Corporate Engagement also needed filing assistance, as many of her files were in disorganized boxes as a result of the quick moving process.

I also assisted the event planners with several major fundraising events. Bash of the Titans, an auction sponsored by the team, took place the week I arrived so I completed last minute tasks like creating item placards. The following week was Stars for Second Harvest, one of the biggest fundraisers of the year with a benefit concert at the Ryman Auditorium featuring Florida-Georgia Line. I stuffed programs, created VIP passes, and handled merchandise sales.

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The event planners had a room, rather than a cubicle like most employees, and they fondly called it the “Party Cave.” This type of work, while more stressful, was more exciting than database work, and I quickly realized that I would need a job working with and talking to other people, as opposed to sitting alone in a cubicle working on a computer all day.

Media events were another fun aspect of the organization. They tended to be mutual advertising for both Second Harvest and for the corporate donor who was sponsoring us. One example of these was the Tennessee Cattlemen’s Association. We went to the Agriculture Center at MTSU one evening to represent Second Harvest at an auction in which the top three steer would be donated to the food bank (the top steer alone weighed 1000 pounds). While we were certainly a bit out of our element, the Director of Corporate Engagement and I had a great time at this event.

Another fun media event was the Arby’s Foundation’s “Hungry for Happiness” campaign that stopped at the Nashville Boys and Girls club. They have a party bus with lots of games and activities, and the kids had a blast. They fed all the kids there, and they donated a large check to Second Harvest as well. It was also a fun opportunity to get outside of the office and see some of the kids who benefit from the work we do. I had never been to a Boys and Girls club, and it was great to see the impact they have as well.

Working at Second Harvest was an amazing experience, and I learned so much about fundraising, grant writing, event planning, and the ins-and-outs that go into all of these areas. Gratitude is a huge aspect – constantly sending “thank you” notes and keeping good donor relations. I had never seen the corporate side of nonprofit work and knew relatively little about

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how they raised money. I cannot imagine a better team to have taught me these skills, and I am incredibly grateful for the experience.

While I do not know what my career goals are exactly, I do know that I want to do nonprofit work. This experience has helped to prepare me for that and has helped me consider the kinds of day-to-day responsibilities that I would or would not want to perform in my career.