



The mission of the Food Bank of Lincoln is to alleviate hunger in Southeast Nebraska.

Life of Reilly: Fresh Food and Fresh Recipes

Spring is here, and that means Lincoln Fresh is off to another fresh start at the Food Bank of Lincoln. It is also the first full season with James Reilly behind the wheel of the big blue produce truck. Reilly joined the Food Bank last fall after six years as the Operations Manager at the Gathering Place.

“We enjoyed the support of countless individuals and organizations,” he said. “To me, none quite as important and impactful as the Food Bank of Lincoln.”

The Food Bank relied heavily on hope-minded partners, such as Reilly and Gathering Place Administrator Lisa Janssen, to continue operations during the pandemic.

“Many businesses and non-profits were faced with the difficult but understandable decision to reduce or eliminate services,” Reilly said. “We ambitiously expanded the dinner program from five to seven days a week. The number of people we served on these nights was routinely three or four times the amount we were accustomed to. By the time I left the position, we had seen the numbers settle, but never to pre-pandemic levels. We were serving more people, more often. The Gathering Place’s service expansion relied upon the Food Bank’s staff staying safe and their distribution center staying open.

“The Food Bank’s resilience was our resilience. Our resilience supported the already resilient individuals that we served. I am grateful to have done so much good work at the Gathering Place and I am grateful for the role that the Food Bank played in that work.”

Reilly had a starring role as one of the soup makers at the 2019 Empty Bowls luncheon at Embassy Suites.

“Mary Arter from the Food Bank invited me to represent the Gathering Place. Some of the greatest restaurants in the city showed up, each with their own incredible, already popular house recipes. And there I was, serving what was my first and so far only stab at something called, ‘Cheeseburger Soup.’



Lincoln Fresh opened the 2022 season on March 28. This will be the fourth year of operations for the produce truck.

“I shared a serving booth with two very sweet and funny women from another partner agency who had suggested this soup. I had just left culinary school and had been considering a fancier offering for the hundreds of guests at the hotel ballroom, but I agreed to their suggestion with prideful reluctance. What in the world did I know? Along with our celebrity server, City Councilman Bennie Shobe, we ladled hundreds of cups out of our respective roasters and ultimately, to our surprise, we were voted one of the top five soups of the day.



James Reilly serving Cheeseburger Soup at Empty Bowls 2019.

“This ended up being one of the neatest experiences of my life.”

It’s pretty neat now having James on our team full-time. For more information on Lincoln Fresh and Empty Bowls, scheduled for May 31, please visit www.lincolnfoodbank.org. For more on the Gathering Place, visit www.communityactionatwork.org.