



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Contact: Elizabeth Reich
64 Passaic Street
Hackensack, NJ 07601
(201) 489-9545 ext. 211
www.bergenvolunteers.org
reich@bergenvolunteers.org

**Donate Don't Dispose
How Students are Battling Food Insecurity in Bergen County**

Hackensack, New Jersey - With the help of Bergen Volunteers, four rising seniors at Bergen County Technical High School in Teterboro are working with local community partners to help battle food insecurity in Bergen County.

Joy Botros, Samantha Gomez, Lexi Kest, and Mia Palli wanted to find a viable solution to the challenges of food waste and hunger in Bergen County. Pioneers of "Donate Don't Dispose," these four young leaders were seeking to create a student-run food amelioration initiative with an emphasis on food waste repurposing.

"We are simply a group of high school students who identified a persistent problem and were determined to find a solution," shared Lexi Kest, senior at Bergen County Technical High School in Teterboro. "Our focus is on taking excess food from donors that would otherwise be disposed of in order to bring it to local food pantries."

At the onset of their initiative the students were committed to developing a partnership with a local restaurant or catering company. After months of research and failed attempts for cross-collaboration, the students were connected to Bergen Volunteers to help find a solution. As a key partner in Bergen County's Food Security Task Force, Bergen Volunteers is well-positioned to connect the students to civic groups, donors, volunteers, and distribution centers.

"At Bergen Volunteers we serve as the hub of the community, continuously responding to emerging needs through our many strategic partnerships," shared Debbie Emery, Manager of Community and Civic Engagement. "When I was



introduced to this group of amazing students I knew immediately that I had to connect them with a business that would help turn their idea into a reality."

Through Bergen Volunteers, the students connected with Bergen County Commissioner Tracy Zur, who heads up Bergen County's Food Security Task Force, to create a formal partnership with Anette and Gary Lipman of Apple Spice Catering in South Hackensack, and the Lodi Food Pantry.

"I could not be more ecstatic to see the energy from our next generation of leaders. Not only are they reducing food waste, but also bringing food to people in need," said Commissioner Zur. "I am proud of these amazing students who are setting forth to be a part of the solution."

The four students visit Apple Spice every Friday afternoon to repurpose and repackage pounds of sandwiches, salads, and fresh vegetables that would otherwise be thrown away. The students are then delivering the food each week to the Lodi Food Pantry.

"At Apple Spice, we are overjoyed and very proud to be able to help Lexi, Samantha, Mia and Joy put their school research into action. Their model of food repurposing will help save pounds and pounds of food that would otherwise go to waste." shared Lipman. "At a time when so many in our community are going hungry, these young student leaders are doing their part to make a difference. I encourage all of my fellow caterers and restaurant owners to reach out and contribute to this critical effort. Together we can all make a difference."

During their last trip the students packed more than 60 sandwiches and fresh produce to give to the Lodi Food Pantry.

"We are amazed by Gary's generosity and are proud to be able to work together to help battle hunger in Bergen County," concluded Kest.

If you are interested in learning more or want to get involved in hunger relief efforts, please contact Debbie Emery at demery@bergenvolunteers.org.



About Bergen Volunteers:

Founded in 1966, Bergen Volunteers turns caring into meaningful action by engaging volunteers to improve lives and strengthen the community via a three pronged approach: Our own and external community programs, community engagement, and civic leadership.

We recruit volunteers to provide critical services to youth, families, veterans, seniors, and those who are economically disadvantaged, through our own programs and by supporting the nonprofit community. We offer individuals and businesses volunteer, networking, service, and training opportunities that address community needs. We also provide leadership and professional development opportunities for individuals living and working in Bergen County, educating people about our community and training them to be civically active.

To learn more, visit www.bergenvolunteers.org and follow us on social media, including Bloggr, Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, and Twitter @BergenVolunteers. Bergen Volunteers is a not-for-profit 501 (c)3 organization.

###