

Farr's legacy

He played a key role in the food bank's rebound

When Pat Farr took over the helm of FOOD for Lane County three years ago, he had three goals: to get the agency out of debt and make it financially stable, to develop a strong and cohesive staff, and to restore the agency's battered public image.

At the time, those were ambitious — some believed, impossible — goals. The nonprofit agency was still in turmoil after its board fired Caroline Frengle, FOOD for Lane County's iconic founder and its executive director for nearly two decades.

Under Frengle's leadership, the agency became the second largest food bank in the state and by far its most innovative, offering nutrition education, organizing community gardens, running a gleaning program and working in countless other creative ways to help people avoid hunger. But Frengle and the board clashed over a lack of budgetary discipline that forced the agency to cut staff salaries and go into debt to cover day-to-day operating expenses.

Three years later, Farr has left FOOD for Lane County to join a local consulting firm with the satisfaction of knowing he has achieved all three of his goals. The food bank has a healthy cash reserve of \$230,000 and meets its operating budget without borrowing. Its 42-member staff is strong, capable and in tune with the agency's board.

As for the agency's image, it's hard to imagine a more complete

turnaround. For most Lane County residents, the food bank's troubles are a distant speck on the memory horizon.

Farr deserves much credit for this resurgence, although it certainly must be shared with the agency's resilient staff, its dedicated board of directors and its committed donors.

In many ways, Farr was a curious choice for the job. He was an outsider to the world of social services and had no experience with the unique and daunting logistics of collecting, storing and distributing huge quantities of food to people in need. His background was in retail management, and he had been elected in 2002 as a Republican member of the Oregon House of Representatives after serving two terms on the Eugene City Council.

But Farr's political acumen proved an invaluable asset, particularly in healing rifts within the agency and in rebuilding its relationships with the community. His business skills proved helpful in putting the agency on firm financial footing, and Farr was, in his own understated way, a passionate and powerful advocate for the needy. Anyone who has ever listened to Farr talk about hungry children in this community could not help but be deeply moved by his conviction and sense of urgency.

Lane County residents owe Pat Farr an enduring debt of gratitude for his service at FOOD for Lane County.

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