



**A REFRESHING IDEA FEEDING THE NEED:** ReFresh Foods is a recently-launched program that picks up fresh, perishable food items from area businesses and redistributes them to Halton-area food banks. Here, from left, Blair Richardson, chair of Food for Life Canada, Juliana Sprott of The Sprott Foundation and Marcus Logan, ReFresh Foods program director, unveil a new hybrid truck outside of Ippolito Fruit and Produce. The vehicle was donated by The Sprott Foundation.

## ReFresh Foods helps Halton's hungry

Melanie Cummings, Special To Burlington Post

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Waste not because there's want.

In more ways than one, ReFresh Foods is relieving businesses of excess food by delivering it to those who need it most. And they're doing it in an environmentally- friendly way, with a fuel-efficient hybrid truck.

Last Tuesday saw the launch of an innovative collection and redistribution program created by the well-established registered charity Food for Life and its latest creation called ReFresh Foods.

Fresh food such as fruits, vegetables, fish/meat and dairy are a rare treat for people living on a low income. So ReFresh Foods steps in to redistribute surplus fresh and frozen food from restaurants, food makers, farmers, grocery stores, bakeries and corporate suppliers to any or all of the nine food banks, and front-line service agencies in Milton, Burlington, Oakville and Halton Hills.

To help make it work, the Sprott Foundation researched, ordered and then donated a hybrid truck to do the job.

The 100 supporters who attended last Tuesday's kick-off event held at Ippolito Foods on North Service Road got an up close look at the new refrigerated, bright neon green-and-white Canadian-built truck that will pick up and drop off the food seven days a week throughout the region.

Those organizations, including school-based snack and breakfast programs that want to access the supply need only to register with ReFresh.

"Our goal is to reduce hunger in Halton," said the program's director, Marcus Logan.

It is estimated that more than 28,000 Halton residents live below the poverty line and one out of every 13 are children.

According to a 2007 study of Halton's food bank system it's estimated there are 31,000 people (11,000 of them children) who lack the financial resources to purchase a nutritionally-adequate diet. The same study suggested these numbers could increase by three per cent per year.

Halton's food banks, which rely primarily on public donations and volunteers to run them, manage to serve 15,000 people yearly.

According to ReFresh, local food banks, which up until now have typically been stocked with canned and non-perishable packaged foods, are only able to fill 10 per cent of their client's grocery needs.

Adding fresh and frozen groceries at local food banks and frontline social service agencies is a welcome nutritional addition to people who subsist on a minimal amount of sustenance.

ReFresh taps into available sources of food from 90 food producers and distributors in the region in a systematic, logistical way, said Logan. Often restaurants, supermarkets, bakeries, food manufacturers, processors and farmers have excess supplies of food in their stock that is either discontinued, mislabeled, surplus, or close to its expiration date.

By taking such unwanted items out of their warehouses — for free and seven days a week — the ReFresh program lowers a company's storage and disposal costs and eases their logistical planning.

This redistribution set-up is not a made-in-Halton solution, but rather one that has been "borrowed" from similar prototypes used in Ottawa, Northumberland and Waterloo, said Logan.

As word spreads other communities closer to home are tapping into the ReFresh experience, in the hopes offering a similar program, he added.

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