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(John Arnold photo available upon request: [johna@wmgleaners.org](mailto:johna@wmgleaners.org)

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## WEST MICHIGAN HUNGER FIGHTER HONORED NATIONALLY

ORLANDO, FL – At the Feeding America National Conference in Orlando, FL Thursday, John Arnold who directs West Michigan’s regional food bank was honored with the national organization’s highest award given an individual, the John van Hengel Award.

John van Hengel created the world’s first regional food bank in Phoenix, AZ in 1967. His idea has now spread worldwide and now annually routes over two billion pounds of food aid to needy Americans. Feeding America, formerly called America’s Second Harvest, is the national association of America’s food banks, and each year honors one individual with an award named after Mr. van Hengel for their contributions in advancing the art and science of food banking.

John Arnold has directed Feeding America West Michigan Food Bank (formerly Second Harvest Gleaners Food Bank of West Michigan) since 1989, having previously directed the Central Illinois Foodbank and the St. Louis Area Food Bank, and serving as the national association’s first Director of Network Services. Among his many innovations and initiatives are: pioneering food banking services in rural areas, developing a branch food bank model now copied nationally, starting 10 food banks, promotion of formulas for estimating areas’ food aid and food agency needs, coordinating international award-winning research on how communities can adequately address their hunger problem, promotion of “client choice” (clients picking out their own food), and pioneering the use of former beer delivery trucks as mobile food pantries. Under his direction West Michigan’s food bank has grown from distributing 3.1 million pounds in 1988 to 22.0 million pounds in 2008.

The side-effects of cancer medications prevented John from attending the awards ceremony in person, so Feeding America West Michigan Food Bank’s assistant director,

Teresa Pawl-Knapp accepted the award on his behalf, reading a statement from John that concluded, “One of the bonds that John van Hengel and I shared was an unshakable belief that food banking can adequately address this country’s hunger problem. I am committed to living long enough to prove that point, so stay tuned! This adventure has only just begun!”

Feeding America West Michigan Food Bank is West Michigan’s regional nonprofit clearing house for donated food and grocery products on their way from the food industry to churches and charity agencies that provide food assistance to needy people. From its warehouses in Houghton, Ishpeming, Sault Ste. Marie, Petoskey, Cadillac, Comstock Park, and St. Joseph it supplies nearly 1,300 food pantries, soup kitchens, homeless shelters, and other similar organizations with an average of about 97,000 lbs. of food per day, significantly enhancing their ability to adequately address the food aid needs of the 400,000+ people in West Michigan who seek such help each year. The food bank opened its doors (as West Michigan Gleaners, Inc.) in April, 1981, and since then has distributed 278 million pounds of food and grocery products, saving charity agencies and their supporters across West Michigan over \$0.5 billion.

Feeding America is the national association of 200+ food banks across the United States who collectively will route over 2 billion pounds of food aid to and through over 60,000 charity food aid agencies across the U.S. this year. Among its many current initiatives in trying to increase the amounts of food being distributed and to improve services to previously un-served and under-served communities is promotion of the mobile food pantry model pioneered here in West Michigan.

About not being able to attend the awards ceremony John Arnold said, “Of course I’d have loved to have been there, but it is hard not to love also being here where we and the wonderful organizations we are blessed to work with will route yet another 100,000 pounds of food aid to people who need it today. Being able to provide that help is the real award.”

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