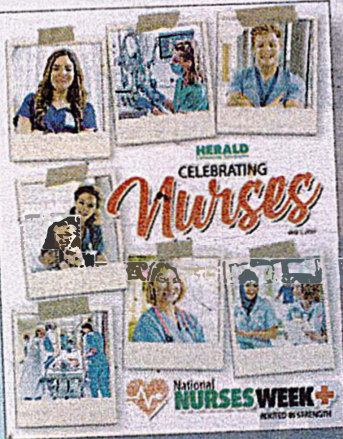


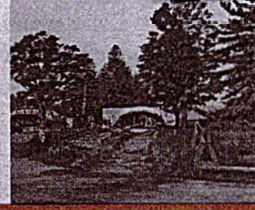
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Southern State's divided legacy
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Washington yanks food aid from L.I. Cares

By **JUAN LASSO**

jlasso@lherald.com

this spring.

When Yovica Valentin steps into the Valley Stream Long Island Cares food pantry each month, she's not just picking up groceries — she's trying to keep her life from unraveling. The 29-year-old Air Force National Guard member and a neonatal intensive care unit nurse has been on extended medical leave for two years, grappling with undiagnosed health issues and mounting medical bills.

The pantry's offerings — staples like eggs, meat, and bread — have become a lifeline. But under the Trump administration's recent cuts to federal food aid, those basics may suddenly be harder to come by.

Truckloads of federally promised poultry, produce, and other food shipments were set to arrive at Long Island Cares

But by early March, the Department of Agriculture abruptly canceled those deliveries, freezing \$500 million in Biden-era aid distributed through the Emergency Food Assistance Program and backed by the Commodity Credit Corporation.

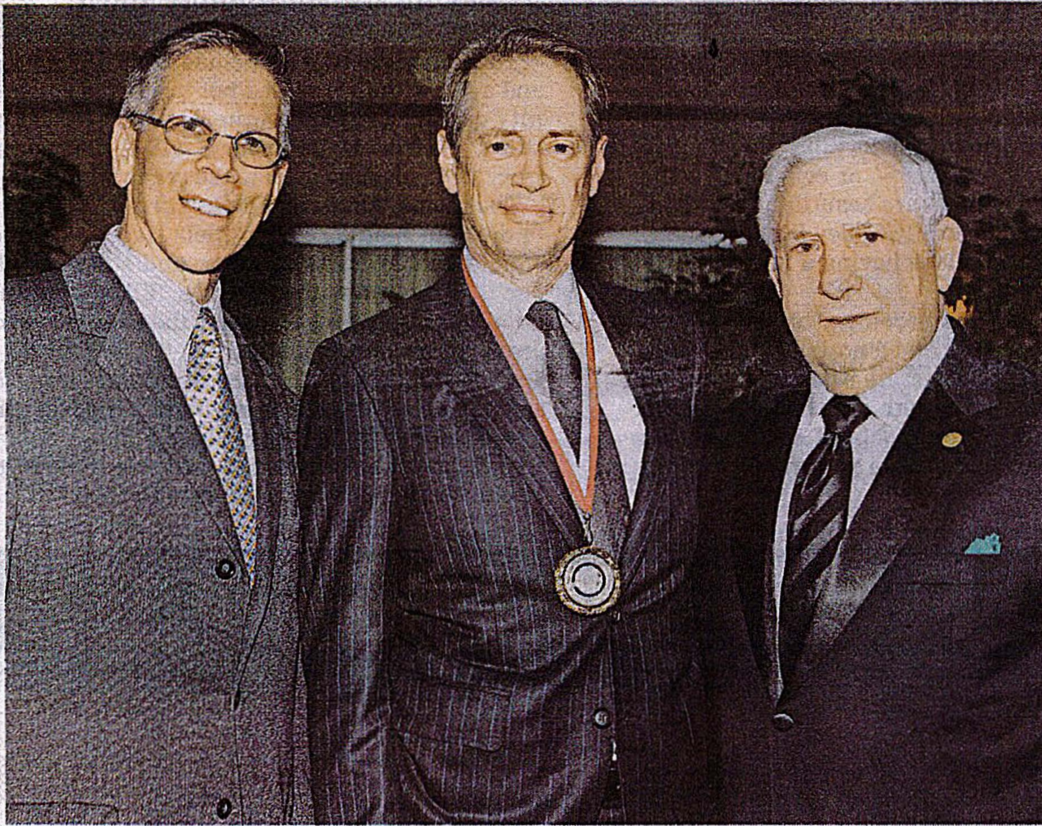
You can't replace food at this scale, at this speed, simply by getting more donations. That's not a feasible choice here.

DAN EGAN
 chief executive,
 Feeding New York
 State

The cut—shaving less than 0.01 percent of the \$6.8 trillion federal budget—deals a crushing blow to the regional food giant, wiping out an estimated 250 million pounds of fresh food. Now it is grappling with how to fill the glaring shortfall on short notice at a time when hunger is rising and funding streams are rapidly drying up.

Long Island Cares CEO Paul Patcher warns that the pain of this decision will be felt across Long Island, especially among working families, seniors, and the many households “living

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Herald file photo

Jerry “The Bull” Seckler, right, the fierce heart of L.I. wrestling who lifted a sport and a generation, died in March. With him were fellow Central wrestlers Richard Earl and Steve Buscemi.

Jerry Seckler, Nassau's wrestling Bull, dies at 87

By **JUAN LASSO**

jlasso@lherald.com

Jerry Seckler — the Nassau County wrestling legend who could lift kids twice his size well into his 60s, and fought his entire life for the soul of the sport — died on March 10 in Rockville Centre. He was 87. In a world full of tough guys, Seckler wasn't just tough. He was unforgettable.

Those who knew him best say wrestling wasn't just part of Jerry's life — it was the rhythm of his life. From the time he first stepped on a mat as an eighth grader, he was hooked for life. He finished second in the Nassau County South Shore Championships that year, setting off a run that would make him one of Long Island's most decorated

young wrestlers.

As a freshman at Valley Stream Central High School, Jerry went undefeated in dual meets, winning the South Shore title and placing second at the Long Island Championships. A year later, he repeated as South Shore champion and took fifth at the National AAU Championships.

By his junior year, he wasn't just winning — he was dominating, claiming South Shore and Long Island titles, and adding a Senior Meet crown for good measure. His scholastic career was capped with a national prep school championship and the title of Outstanding Prep School Wrestler in the country — the kind of accolade that even now would stop wrestling enthusiasts mid-sen-

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Food banks brace for funding shortfalls

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

paycheck to paycheck.”

“Worst case scenario, there might be less food to go around, because, number one, we’re not getting as much USDA Foods as we did last year,” said Patcher. “And number two, the need is up by 30 percent, and therefore we have to serve more people with less.”

Like many Long Island residents, Valentin has seen her cost of living swell while her income remains relatively flat.

“Everything is just going up, but the money is basically staying the same, so it’s been very hard,” she said. The 29-year old Elmont resident has even debated moving from the state entirely though harbors hopes she can stay in the place she’s always called “home.”

She is also among a growing number of residents turning to the Valley Stream food pantry, which has borne a surge in demand that shows no signs of slowing. In just six months, the number of people relying on its services nearly doubled—from 601 in September 2024 to 1,087 by March 2025. Over that same period, meal distribution skyrocketed from 5,427 to 9,751.

It’s unclear how much of that uptick comes from pantry regulars shifting from the Freeport location to the new Valley Stream food distribution center, but Patcher said that there is no doubt demand in general is up across the board.

Now the nonprofit is urgently considering a range of options to confront the rollback — part of the Trump administration’s broader campaign to shrink government spending and eliminate programs that “no longer effectuate the goals of the agency.”

One immediate step, he said, is to appeal directly to donors — both major corporate sponsors and everyday supporters.

“But there’s a caveat,” noted Patcher. Inflation is still stubbornly high, national figures show consumer confidence is slipping, and a subsequent pullback in spending is also hitting Long Island Cares.

“People are giving less — sometimes 50 percent less. Sometimes 20 percent. It depends,” he said. “Someone who gave us \$50 last year might only be able to give \$25 now. Families are watching every dollar — what they spend, what they buy, and yes, even how they give to the causes they care about most.”

Cut off and left waiting

Dan Egan, chief executive of Feeding New York State — the nonprofit network representing New York’s 10 regional food banks, including Long Island Cares — is deeply skeptical that food banks can close the food gap simply by ramping up donations.

“You can’t replace food at this scale, at this speed, simply by getting more donations. That’s not a feasible choice here,” he said.

Egan argues that the wild unpredictability of Donald Trump’s stop-and-start tariff policies strains food banks’ purchasing power in ways the public might not anticipate. Take aluminum cans, for instance.

Since aluminum is heavily used in canned goods — many of which food banks distribute — the tariffs indirectly make food more expensive and harder to source.

In March, the U.S. levied a 25 percent tariff on all steel and aluminum imports, including tin mill steel used in canned food packaging.

Most tariffs have been put on a 90-day pause since April, but souring trade relations and disruptions with the United States’ largest trading allies, Canada and Mexico, are causing friction across the entire food supply chain.

“We get an enormous amount of produce in the United States from our friends in Canada, from our friends in Mexico,” he said. “That’s slowing down, and those prices are going way up, and we’re hearing that from our food bank colleagues.”

Long Island Cares looks to Albany for relief

Patcher remains cautiously optimistic that Albany may soften the impact on food banks if Governor Kathy Hochul approves proposed increases to the Nourish New York and Hunger Prevention Nutrition Assistance Program funding from \$54 million to \$75 million. Yet, negotiations over the governor’s \$252 billion budget stalled well past the April 1 deadline.

The acrimonious tension between Hochul and Albany lawmakers in recent days casts doubts about whether any increase is forthcoming.

Then there’s the looming threat that, should federal cuts to critical services like SNAP and WIC come to fruition, New York will face a stark choice: implement cuts of its own or absorb the costs without the option to raise new revenue.

Patcher emphasized the danger of Trump’s push to cut federal funding, warning that such moves could backfire if they also undermine food pantries. While federal cuts to social net programs drive up demand for food banks, these pantries remain increasingly ill-equipped to handle the growing need.

For now, Patcher said, as federal and state leaders remain stuck in “wait-and-see” limbo, there is no clear map forward on how to navigate a problematic situation.

“We’re waiting for guidance, and that’s a big question mark for us,” he said. “Nobody knows what’s next.”

Everything is just going up, but the money is basically staying the same, so it’s been very hard.

YOVICA VALENTIN
service member



Alice Moreno/Herald

After a federal aid freeze wiped out hundreds of millions of dollars in promised food shipments, Long Island Cares faces a deepening hunger crisis, scrambling for donations and state support as rising need collides with economic uncertainty.

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Legacy Planning

Some thirty-five years ago your writer was taught that estate planning is about getting your assets to whom you want, when you want, and the way you want, with the least amount of taxes and legal fees possible.

In the intervening time, we have learned that estate planning is more — it is legacy planning. Legacy has two meanings (1) the assets you leave, and (2) the impression you leave. Your assets will dissipate, but your impression will endure.

Were you kind and generous? Were you forgiving and grateful? Were you compassionate and did you bring light into the world, despite your setbacks.

Our readers have surely noticed over the years that these sponsored columns are not only about law, but just as often about how to become a better human being. Much of it has been learned from our interactions with clients. A client once asked if I had a degree in psychology. I answered yes, I have a Masters. When she asked where I got it, I said sitting behind this desk eight hours a day for the last thirty-five years!

Observing people, you learn that perspective is everything. We consider it part of our calling to provide clients with different perspectives with which to view personal and family matters. It is not difficult to see how looking at a situation from a different perspective can completely change the way we see the world. A client came in relating how furious she was that her daughter’s abusive husband used her daughter to obtain his degree and then asked for a divorce and move out. Yes, I said, but if it was my daughter and she had an abusive husband I would be thrilled that he had move out. Oh, the client said, “I never thought of that!” Her view of the matter had shifted considerably. Thoreau put it, “It’s not what you look at that matters, it’s what you see.”

Working on oneself to become a better person is a classic win/win situation. Our lives become better as do those of everyone we come into contact with. The Dalai Lama says we are all selfish but we can engage in “enlightened selfishness”, doing better by others for our own sake.

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FOOD PANTRY

Q&A with a Valley Stream Long Island Cares volunteer

By JUAN LASSO

jlasso@liherald.com

Anthony "Tony" Cannonito has lived in Valley Stream for over 60 years. Now retired, he spends his time helping neighbors in need as a volunteer at Long Island Cares' food distribution center in Valley Stream. From stocking shelves to walking clients through the pantry process, Cannonito brings heart and hustle to the work—and a deep sense of gratitude for the community that raised him.

The Herald caught up with Tony to talk about what brought him to the pantry, how it operates, and what keeps him coming back.

Q: How did you first get involved with Long Island Cares?

Cannonito: My wife and I

had been contributors to Long Island Cares for years, along with other local charities. After we both retired, she started her own volunteering, and I was looking for something meaningful myself. When I heard they were planning to open a pantry in Valley Stream—my hometown for over 60 years—I jumped at the chance. This community has been good to me and my family. Volunteering felt like the right way to give back.

Q: What was your initial role at the pantry? Has it changed?

Cannonito: It started pretty simple—stocking shelves and helping clients. I actually worked in retail while I was in college, so receiving orders, rotating stock... it all felt familiar. But as the need has grown, we've all had to wear multiple hats. Some days I'm on the floor

helping clients, other days I'm unloading trucks or organizing the pet food section. We "flow to the work," as I like to say.

Q: Have you noticed an increase in demand recently?

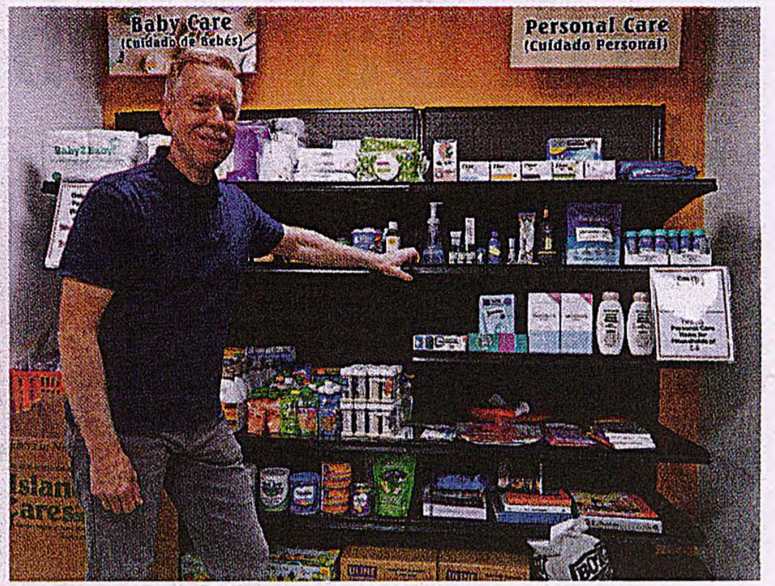
Cannonito: Oh, absolutely. The last month or two especially—it's really picked up. When we opened, it was slow. Now, the flow of clients is steady. It keeps all of us busy, and we could definitely use more volunteers.

Q: What's the experience like for someone walking in for the first time?

Cannonito: We greet everyone by name. I'll say, "Hi, I'm Tony—first time here?" If they're new, I explain the layout and how it works. Based on their household size, they're entitled to a certain number of proteins, produce, dairy items, and so on. We walk them through each section. It's designed to feel dignified—like a small-scale grocery store. We even have a pet food section called Baxter's Pet Pantry.

Q: Have you seen anything that really moved you during your time there?

Cannonito: Definitely. Sometimes a client will say, "I'm



Alice Moreno/Herald photos

Valley Stream resident Tony Cannonito shares how retirement led him to volunteer at Long Island Cares' new local food pantry, where he helps fight hunger in and around his community.

entitled to this, but I don't need it this month—maybe someone else does." That kind of generosity, especially from people in need themselves, is humbling.

Q: What's something people misunderstand about food insecurity?

Cannonito: Unless you've seen it up close, it's hard to grasp. It's not just homelessness or job loss. Some people work full-time and still can't afford to feed their families.

The pantry fills a critical gap—and I just wish more folks understood how widespread the need really is.

Q: What's the most rewarding part of this work for you?

Cannonito: Knowing that I'm helping someone avoid going to bed hungry. Nobody in this country should be food insecure. If I can help even one person carry a little less burden, then that's more than enough for me.

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Anthony says he is proud to tend to residents throughout the area.

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