

## FEED ST. MARY'S COUNTY – A PROFILE IN ROTARY LEADERSHIP

By George Hurlburt

As she prepared to undertake her singularly stellar year as President of the Rotary Club of Lexington Park, Dr. Linda Lymas, approached Leadership Southern Maryland (LSM) to perform a study. LSM is a regional nonprofit organization that nurtures interest, regional knowledge and leadership capacities of Southern Maryland leaders while educating them on the challenges that face the region. Working with a small Rotary team, Dr. Lymas prevailed upon LSM to commission a team to seek gaps in the community that would be suitable for a Rotary Club project. Amplifying on an existing St. Mary's County's Gap analysis report, the 2018 LSM report indicated that food insecurity was a growing, but tractable problem in St. Mary's County.

Working in close coordination with her Club and the greater community at large, Dr. Lymas built a strong and diversified coalition towards the creation of a working Food Bank for St. Mary's County. She quickly attracted and retained many willing partners. During her tenure as Club President, the Rotary Club of Lexington Park set aside \$50,000 to get a food bank off the ground. Through her diligence, Dr. Lymas and the team she built, more than doubled this amount through grants and community participation. Rotary District Distributed Funds (DDF) played a key role in providing much needed capital investment funds to acquire a walk-in freezer and refrigerator and to generally outfit the Food Bank.

Recognizing that a food bank was a community asset, Dr. Lymas set up a

parent corporation to own and manage the food bank on behalf of its stakeholders. "Feed St. Mary's, Inc." is now a Maryland Corporation which has made application for non-profit status under the Internal Revenue Service. Simultaneously, Dr. Lymas spearheaded a partnership with the Maryland Food Bank assuring that client pantries and soup kitchens would only pay for what they order. The model called for no excess food bank overhead charges to these food bank clients. She also worked closely with County Commissioner Mike Hewitt to secure a 5-year rent-free venue at the U-Haul in the Great Mills corridor.

The new Food Bank facility has now been fully outfitted, inspected and approved for use and occupancy as a food bank. A ribbon cutting ceremony in December led the way for pilot operations in March with limited deliveries designed to work out food distribution logistics. Feed St. Mary's now has expanding electronic presence via Facebook and its web page ([feedstmarys.org](http://feedstmarys.org)) and is growing



[Above] Dr. Linda Lymas cuts the ribbon for the Feed St. Mary's Food Bank—A Rotary Inspired project. [Below] Feed St. Mary's Freezer and Refrigerator Unit made possible with DDF matching grants



its reserves through active fundraising.

Through her dedication, partnership building, business acumen and long-range vision, Dr. Lymas has set the stage for a material asset that will long benefit the growing number of individuals in St. Mary's County who are threatened with food insecurity. Her unwavering leadership in pursuit of methodically bringing this noble vision to full fruition serves as an exemplar for what can be accomplished by Rotarians with a mission.