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## Eastchester Philanthropist Extends Generous Challenge

Eastchester resident Pat Lanza has pledged to give \$750,000 to the Food Bank of Westchester if other local residents and corporation leaders match her donation.

By **Edouard Boulat** | [Email the author](#) | August 16, 2011 | [Print](#)

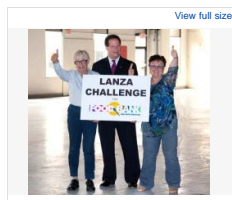
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Amid one of the worst economic downturns in the history of the United States, Eastchester philanthropist Pat Lanza is making a very clear statement: donate, and I will match.

Lanza recently donated \$750,000 to the Food Bank for Westchester as part of a 'challenge grant' that will run through January 2012. Any donation made before then will be matched by Lanza up to \$750,000, and will go towards offsetting the Food Bank's moving costs as the organization looks to relocate from Millwood to a new Elmsford location.

According to Food Bank Communications Manager Jeanne Wilcox, the Food Bank's current location in Millwood – a 13,000-square-foot warehouse – already "reached its capacity years ago," and with demands for emergency food skyrocketing in the last five years, is simply no longer able to support the organization's operations. In 2009, the Food Bank for Westchester saw a 30% rise in demand for food, and another 10% increase the following year in 2010.

After years of searching for a new location, administrators finally came upon a 37,000-square-foot office and warehouse property available in Elmsford, which any donation as part of Lanza's challenge grant will help to equip and refurbish. The cost of the renovations – which include adding freezers, food racks, an extensive refrigerating system and office spaces – is estimated at \$2.2 million. The Food Bank already has \$700,000 saved up from prior campaigns that will go into financing the move, leaving a balance of \$1.5 million, which is where Lanza comes in.

According to Wilcox, Lanza had heard about the new potential Elmsford location for approximately a week before she called Executive Director for the Food Bank Christine Rohatynskij and made the challenge grant offer.

"She's [Lanza] been a funder of ours for a little while, and she's very much behind people that do good work in communities," said Rohatynskij, a good friend of Lanza's. "She does not like the idea that there is hunger in our communities, and this is what moves her to support the work that we do. Hopefully this will motivate other people to join her in helping us move forward, because the need is great, and I don't think it's going to go away any time soon."

Lanza, who is a loyal benefactor to a number of charity organizations both in Westchester County and nation-wide, hopes her challenge will rouse local residents and corporation leaders to the extensive need present for donations and food for fellow community members, many of whom simply cannot provide for themselves.

"I would hope that other people in Westchester realize how necessary it is to feed these people," Lanza said. "A lot of them are senior citizens and children. Kids can't help themselves, and the older people are stuck. Jobs are hard to come by and it doesn't look like it's going to get better that much sooner, so you have to do something in the meantime. God has been good to me, so I want to help others."

The Food Bank for Westchester distributes food to 227 hunger-relief programs throughout the county, which serves the estimated 200,000 county residents that are hungry or at risk of hunger by way of food pantries, soup kitchens, shelters and residential programs. According to a 2009 report conducted by Feeding America, the national food bank network, 33% of Westchester food-assistance recipients were children under the age of 18, and 57% were senior citizens. Every day, the Food Bank ships out approximately 10 to 12 tons of food to local programs, and over 7 million pounds each year.

Lanza has already visited the new warehouse and office space the Food Bank hopes to soon be moving into, and says she is very happy with the location her and others' donations will help the organization lease and refurbish. Food Bank administrators estimate that the added warehouse space will help cut down the number of people in need who are not provided for by as much as 80%.

"It's huge, I love it," Lanza said of the new Elmsford warehouse and office space. "It's got a big space for refrigerated foods which they get a lot of, and now they have more docks so they can load more trucks at one time. Everything is just more helpful than it was before."

When asked whether she thought Lanza's full \$750,000 donation would be matched before January, Rohatynskij's answer was short, and clear.

"That is our goal," she said. "And we have to do it."

To donate to the Food Bank or to partake in Lanza's challenge grant, visit [www.foodbankforwestchester.org](http://www.foodbankforwestchester.org) or call 914.923.1100. Donations can be made online, by mail or in person.

Related Topics: [Donations](#), [Food Bank of Westchester](#), and [Philanthropy](#)

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**Balar Gazor**

4:34am on Wednesday, August 17, 2011

Very promising indeed. What would be the contribution of the landlord and the companies benefitting from the refurbishing orders to this worthy cause ? Surely, in this economy, leasing empty space, at risk of remaining empty for a very long time, and 7-figure refurbishing contracts are a boon for the private sector. Are they offering special conditions ?

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