

# REGIONAL FOOD BANK<sup>®</sup> *of Oklahoma*

*"Fighting Hunger...Feeding Hope"™*



## Rodney W. Bivens, Founder

*Rodney W. Bivens is the founder of the Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma and served as its Executive Director until retirement in September of 2016. His work with other nonprofit agencies led him to witness what hunger can do to individuals and families. Out of his personal conviction that no one should have to face hunger in a nation blessed with so much abundance, he founded the organization in 1980.*

*Born and raised in Chickasha, Oklahoma, Bivens and his three older brothers grew up on a farm just outside of town. After his father was disabled in a car accident, the Bivens' family came to rely on friends, family and church to help them keep food on their table. This experience left Bivens with a unique perspective on the impact of hunger on children and families in Oklahoma.*

Under his leadership, the Regional Food Bank grew rapidly to fulfill the need for food in central and western Oklahoma. In its first year of operation, the Regional Food Bank distributed 280,000 pounds of food, which is now distributed in about three days. The nonprofit provides enough food to feed more than 126,000 people every week with administrative and fundraising costs of less than four percent. Since its inception in 1980, the Regional Food Bank has distributed more than 545 million pounds of food to our hungry Oklahoma neighbors.

Bivens and his team at the Regional Food Bank developed one of the first rural distribution systems in the country, which has become a model for other food banks. The Regional Food Bank currently serves more than 1,300 charitable feeding programs and schools throughout 53 counties in central and western Oklahoma, and distributes nationally donated product to four other food banks in Kansas, Texas and New Mexico, as well.

The Regional Food Bank was the first in the nation to implement an online inventory and agency ordering system with new technology for increased efficiency in food distribution. Other efficiency initiatives implemented at the food bank facilitate energy conservation, solid waste reduction, air quality controls and sustainable living techniques for a more efficient operation.

Bivens also shepherded other innovative programs into existence at the Regional Food Bank, including Urban Harvest, an urban sustainable agriculture program that aims to teach individuals and community groups to grow their own food. The Regional Food Bank also implemented the Food for Kids Backpack Program, which provides a backpack full of weekend food to chronically hungry elementary children throughout the school year. The program began in 2003 as a pilot program in five urban elementary schools, and it now serves more than 18,500 children in 501 elementary schools. The School Pantry program was an offshoot of the backpack program when it became evident that hunger didn't end at the elementary school playground. There are now 124 school pantries in middle and high schools in Oklahoma serving the needs of nearly 5,000 chronically hungry students.

As the founder of the 21st food bank in the U.S., Bivens was seen as a leader in the food banking arena. Bivens served on the board of directors of Feeding America for more than 12 years in various positions. He also helped in national disaster relief efforts, and in 2005, set up an emergency relief warehouse for Hurricane Katrina

and Rita storm victims. In less than four weeks, he helped to distribute more than 8 million pounds of relief supplies in the New Orleans area.

Bivens dedicated his entire professional life to social services and improving the quality of life in central Oklahoma. Before founding the organization, he was Director of Hunger and Aging at Neighborhood Services Organization and Director of Social Services at the Mary Mahoney Health Center. He was awarded the prestigious John Van Hengel award in 2007 in recognition of his outstanding efforts in the fight against hunger. In 2008, the Oklahoma Center for Nonprofits recognized the Regional Food Bank with the Oklahoma Nonprofit Excellence award and Bivens was recognized as the "Most Admired NonProfit CEO" by the Journal Record in February of 2013. In 2015, Bivens was recognized with the Pat Potts Visionary Award and the Reynold's Foundation established a new \$10,000 Rodney Bivens Innovator of the Year Award in his name (a total gift of \$100,000).

Bivens holds a master's degree in social work from the University of Oklahoma and a bachelor's degree in sociology from Southeastern State College. He is a graduate of Class IV of Leadership Oklahoma City, a member of the Alumni Association, board member of the Homeless Alliance, member of the national Executive Director's Forum, and member of the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce. Rodney Bivens retired in September, 2016.

