

From Finance to Food Justice

Carmen Cusido

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Carmen Del Guercio's second act was inspired by a personal desire to address food insecurity.

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Carmen Del Guercio grew up in Westfield, Massachusetts, a working-class town near Springfield. His parents, immigrants from Avellino, Italy, worked in an envelope factory and in a kitchen-cabinet factory. Family life, which included Del Guercio's younger brother, Joseph and his maternal grandmother, Geraldina, revolved around food, a theme that resonates deeply in his current work.

"Dinner was always at 4:40 sharp," Del Guercio recalled, adding that his father Carmine often worked side jobs to support the family, making shared meals especially meaningful.

Sundays were usually reserved for big family dinners, a tradition that reinforced bonds with relatives and emphasized the importance of food as a unifying force. The Del Guercio family had a big garden in the backyard, which provided lettuce, tomatoes, green beans and other fresh produce. It was a way to access fresh food and save money.

"We were fortunate not to experience layoffs, but looking back, I realize how close we were to being one event away from food insecurity," Del Guercio said. This awareness stayed with him, influencing his understanding of hunger as a multifaceted issue affecting families who might not fit the stereotypical image of poverty. Del Guercio now works as the president and CEO of the Maryland Food Bank based in Baltimore, Maryland, after nearly 30 years in the financial sector.

A Turning Point

Del Guercio said his father's death at 78 from Alzheimer's in 2016 was a turning point for him, and the reason why he transitioned from his job as the head of private banking at Wilmington Trust to head the Maryland Food Bank (MFB).

"When my father passed away, the sheer number of people who came to pay their respects was overwhelming. It reminded me of the impact he quietly had on so many lives, despite his humble beginnings. I began to reassess my own career. . . . The mission of the Maryland Food Bank drew me in," Del Guercio said.

Alicia Del Guercio, reflecting on her husband's career transition, said: "My husband is one of the most caring and empathetic people I know, so it's no surprise he found his way into the non-profit space. We are all very proud that he can use the skills and experience he acquired during his time in the banking industry to help others."

During his tenure in finance, Del Guercio, 59, served on various nonprofit boards, including the MFB. The organization was grappling with financial mismanagement and operational inefficiencies before Del Guercio took over eight years ago.

Under his leadership, the Maryland Food Bank has shifted from crisis management to sustainable growth. Del Guercio also introduced some entrepreneurial vigor into the food bank by launching [a new movement](https://mdfoodbank.org/hunger-in-maryland/approach/) (<https://mdfoodbank.org/hunger-in-maryland/approach/>) that not only feeds more people but also address the "root causes" of food insecurity.

In 2023, the Maryland Food Bank facilitated the [distribution of nearly 114,000 meals daily](https://mdfoodbank.org/about/financials/) (<https://mdfoodbank.org/about/financials/>) across the state, [serving nearly 306,000 households](https://mdfoodbank.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Maryland-Food-Bank-Annual-Report-FY23.pdf) (<https://mdfoodbank.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Maryland-Food-Bank-Annual-Report-FY23.pdf>) through

363 network partners.

Over 91% of their funds went directly to fighting hunger (<https://mdfoodbank.org/about/financials/>) , including programs like **FoodWorks** (<https://www.wbaltv.com/article/maryland-food-bank-food-works-culinary-training/63044333>) , which helps people learn culinary skills and find jobs.

Partnerships and Solutions

The organization uses data, including unemployment trends, to identify hunger hotspots and allocate resources effectively. Del Guercio also noted that partnerships and community involvement are at the core of the 45-year-old food bank's strategy to address **food insecurity** (<https://www.nextavenue.org/older-americans-food-insecure/>) , which he said is a symptom of deeper societal issues.

These partnerships allow the food bank to bring additional services — such as child care assistance or transportation solutions — to those in need. Research is key in identifying specific challenges, such as transportation barriers in Western Maryland or childcare gaps on the Eastern Shore.

Beyond distributing food, the MFB has expanded its impact through programs like its culinary training initiative. This free, 12-week program helps participants — often from low-income backgrounds — gain culinary skills, job placement support and a transportation stipend. Del Guercio sees this as an extension of the MFB's mission, addressing root causes of food insecurity by empowering individuals with skills and opportunities.

Food banks face numerous challenges, from fluctuating government support to an aging volunteer base, Del Guercio said, adding that MFB is keeping a close eye on government programs like **SNAP** (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program>) , which offers food benefits to low-income families. When benefits are reduced, the pressure on food assistance networks increases, he said.

Inflation has also strained the MFB's operations. "We're spending \$22 million a year on food purchases," Del Guercio said, emphasizing the importance of

contingency planning and advocacy. To ensure sustainability, the MFB provides grants to partners for infrastructure improvements like refrigeration and transportation.

"Nonprofits are being relied on at levels never seen before, which puts pressure on us to operate as efficiently as possible," Del Guercio said. "Inviting people with for-profit experience can help organizations get stronger and more effective, enabling them to achieve bigger visions."