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## Outside the Box: Catherine D'Amato feeds her passion through food bank

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### Catherine D'Amato

**Title:** President and CEO, The Greater Boston Food Bank



Catherine D'Amato, president and CEO of The Greater Boston Food Bank.

W. MARC BERNSAU

**Age:** 62

**Residence:** Somerville

**Education:** Bachelor's degree in theology, [University of San Francisco](#), 1979

*As president and CEO of The Greater Boston Food Bank, [Catherine D'Amato](#) oversees one of the largest nonprofits in the Bay State, an organization that distributes more than 48 million healthy meals and 57 million pounds of food annually through a network of 530 member food pantries, meal programs and shelters across Eastern Massachusetts. The BBJ's [Joe Halpern](#) recently caught up with the veteran nonprofit leader to learn more about the [GBFB](#) and the reasons behind her passion to feed the hungry.*

**Take us back to the beginning and what first fed your passion to feed the hungry.** My parents were farmers, grandparents were restaurant owners, so I'm actually a third-generation food person in our family in some form. But here's the difference: I didn't want to grow it, and I certainly didn't want to cook it (laughing). So my position (at the [GBFB](#)) puts me in a place where I can combine my passion for social justice and my business acumen in a powerful way. How I got here – I literally fell backwards into it. I wanted to be a singer, a songwriter while in college. But I also have a degree in theology and grew up the '60s and '70s, when the issues of social justice were particularly big. Being at the Greater Boston Food Bank and doing what I do now puts me in a position to make a big impact while doing something I love.

**Is the need to feed the hungry in Eastern Massachusetts even more now than in 1995 when you first arrived at the Greater Boston Food Bank?** I don't think the need has grown as much as the population has grown. It's 1-in-10 in terms of individuals who find themselves to be food insecure and need help. It's been as good as 1-in-13 and it's been as bad as 1-in-8. The need has always been here and unfortunately will continue. It's one thing to feed hungry people, and it's another thing to feed hungry people healthy food.

**What is the [GBFB](#) doing to ensure healthy food is being delivered to those in need.** Ten years ago we couldn't move a carrot. Today, 30 percent of our distribution is produce. That is a very big pivot and it takes education and it takes a willingness by those partners to handle the food. You can open a can of dehydrated potatoes and add water and, duh, that's the easy part. But give you a 50-pound bag of carrots, that have to be cleaned, cut, cooked, prepped - that's a very different commitment.

**How would you describe the The Greater Boston Food Bank's business model?** Essentially, we are a charitable food business. We acquire, store and distribute. And we function in more of a wholesale model.

**What are you most proud of, business-wise?** The fact that we were able to raise \$35 million, and build a 125,000-square-foot facility in the center of Boston was quite an accomplishment. When Gov. Patrick was in office, he said to me, “Catherine, that’s a big building.” And I said, yes, governor, it’s a big problem we are working on.” That building was something that changed the way we work because it has allowed us to bring in more state-of-the-art logistics and facilities, things like inventory systems and warehouse management systems and refrigeration and all of those have allowed us to double down on the ability to have healthier foods.

**Is it hard to find talented people? Is the hiring an issue for the GBFB?** We need truck drivers, warehouse workers, inventory specialists and those working in supply chain acquisition. In some ways we compete against the industry that helps us the most for that talent. Here’s the challenge: There’s a greater shortage of CDL truck drivers than there are nurses in America. Yes, truck drivers who have the correct permits are, for us, one of the hardest positions to fill. It’s for that reason that we are looking at starting our own training centers for hard-to-fill positions.

**What does your partnership with the business community look like?** We benefit from many pieces of pro-bono work where companies have done things for us that we could’ve never been able to pay for, whether that’s logistical support, transportation, so we’re very engaged with companies here in Boston to do something, what are you going to do - food, money or time? And I hope you do all three because that’s what makes us go. We need food, we need the financial resources and we need volunteers and there are companies that can do all three.

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<https://www.bizjournals.com/boston/feature/outside-the-box-catherine-d-amato-feedsher-passion.html>