

Q&A with Gemma E. Moran, founding director of United Way/Labor Food Center



John Shishmanian/ NorwichBulletin.com

Gemma E. Moran, 85, of Groton helped forge a partnership between the United Way of Southeastern Connecticut and labor unions to boost regional social services through the food bank that bears her name.

Gemma E. Moran Interview

Gemma E. Moran helped forge a partnership between the United Way of Southeastern Connecticut and labor unions to boost regional social services through the food bank that bears her name.

The facility celebrated its 20th anniversary this year.

Moran's accomplishment, achieved partly from recruiting and inspiring volunteers with her no-nonsense personality, makes her the most popular speaker on the local United Way fundraising circuit, according to the United Way. Moran discussed her many years in union and social activities that have included associations with President John F. Kennedy and Gov. Ella T. Grasso.

By JAMES MOSHER

[Norwich Bulletin](#)

Posted Jul 28, 2009 @ 11:05 PM

Last update Jul 28, 2009 @ 11:33 PM

Read more: [Q&A with Gemma E. Moran, founding director of United Way/Labor Food Center - Norwich, CT - The Bulletin](http://www.norwichbulletin.com/news/x2141126173/Q-A-with-Gemma-E-Moran-founding-director-of-United-Way-Labor-Food-Center#ixzz1vVT3Ye3s) <http://www.norwichbulletin.com/news/x2141126173/Q-A-with-Gemma-E-Moran-founding-director-of-United-Way-Labor-Food-Center#ixzz1vVT3Ye3s>

Q: What inspired you to start the food bank?

A: It started during a strike at EB, but I was thinking about it before that. I noticed there was food insecurity. People had enough to pay bills, but there wasn't much left for food. You can't be productive on an empty belly.

Q: Explain this partnership between the United Way and the labor unions.

A: This area had a terrible reputations for labor relations. Strikes, you name it. The AFL-CIO dispatched me from Boston to work through the difficulties. I had to prove labor could be solid citizens. The work with United Way was part of that.

Q: How tough was it?

A: Whoa, if I knew then what I know now, I would have never taken the job. But I've been blessed. I'm an ordinary person. I've had divine intervention. The volunteers really made it happen, but maybe I was the shepherdess of the flock. The mish-mash turned into a beautiful harmony.

Q: Tell us about some of the people who have helped and inspired you.

A: Gov. Ella Grasso was fantastic. I had a problem in the Norwich area and I came to see her. She called a fellow into the meeting and the problem was solved. I met John Kennedy right after he got out of the Navy. I helped with his campaigns. After he was elected to Congress, he called me and said "Jackie, (Jackie was my nickname) you did a hell of a job." I got to escort him to a major speech he made before the Massachusetts labor movement. I was heartsick when he got shot.

Q: What do you see in the future for the United Way and the food bank?

A: Bigger and better. The United Way is an integral part of our democracy. It's a vocation. I try to get that across in all my PVs — personal visits — for the United Way. It constantly reminds us you must respect human dignity.