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FROM TOP LEFT: Second Harvest Board Member and Baird Managing Director John Moriarty, Second Harvest CEO Kathy Jackson, and the scene at a Second Harvest food sorting event.

A Feast for the Soul

When a community-minded financial services firm puts money and manpower behind a highly respected Bay Area food bank, both sides win.

BY ROBIN HINDERY

Whether personal or professional, the most fruitful relationships bring out the best in both parties and are characterized by mutual respect and appreciation. That's certainly true of the partnership between esteemed financial services firm Robert W. Baird & Co. and Second Harvest Food Bank, one of the Bay Area's most trusted nonprofits.

The pairing dates back several years, to a team-building exercise for Baird's Palo Alto employees soon after the Milwaukee-based firm expanded to the West Coast. "Several of us were around the water cooler, talking about things we could do, and we came up with the idea of a food sort," recalls John Moriarty, managing director and head of Baird's Palo Alto investment banking office, who had volunteered at food banks as a child in South Florida. "We thought that was something everybody could really get excited about, and the more we learned about Second Harvest, the more impressed we were."

There's a lot to admire. Since its inception in 1974, Second Harvest has grown to become one of the country's largest food banks, distributing food to nearly 250,000 people each month in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties, primarily seniors and low-income families with children. In fiscal year 2012, the organization distributed 45 million pounds of food—almost half of it fresh produce—from Daly City down to Gilroy.

"People trust that the dollars they give to Second Harvest today will actually be used to feed hungry people tomorrow," says CEO Kathy Jackson. "We're local, we're dealing with a very basic need, and we're highly efficient. Baird is a strong, trusted organization that has a reputation for integrity and personal service, so that's something we share."

Moriarty agrees. "Baird is a very efficient, team-oriented place, and we found a lot of those attributes at Second Harvest. There are a lot of things we could choose to do to help the community, but this allows us to do so much more as a company than just write a check."

Since that first volunteer event, Baird has participated in two organized food sorts per year—one during the holidays and one in May, during the firm's annual "Baird Gives Back Week," when associates from Baird offices around the world are encouraged to donate their normal work hours to local

organizations. "When we go to do a food sort, it's the senior people all the way down to employees who have just graduated from college, all working together," Moriarty shares. In addition, for the past two years, the firm has co-sponsored Second Harvest's Holiday Food and Fund Drive.

Second Harvest makes it easy for companies like Baird to dive right into volunteering. Food sorting is simple to learn and provides a sense of accomplishment and measureable results. In fact, Jackson says, volunteer groups often split into "teams" and compete to see who can sort the fastest. "A lot of the reason people like volunteering at Second Harvest is we make it easy for them, and it's fun," she says. "They feel really integral and important to what we do."

"It's easy for a nonprofit to say, 'Give us your dollars,'" she continues. "But there's an educational element and an employee-engagement element to a hands-on volunteer experience that makes it more valuable to the employees."

For his part, Moriarty got so much out of the experience that he decided to deepen his involvement with the nonprofit by joining the board, where he has served on the finance committee for the past two years. "It's easy to write a check to an organization, but it's equally important to support it through volunteer hours," he explains. "Instead of sitting back, it's better to lean forward."

Moriarty joined Baird in 2007 largely because of a corporate culture that prioritizes giving back, he says. In addition to Second Harvest, the firm also supports the nondenominational Glide Memorial Church in San Francisco, as well as Samasource, a San Francisco nonprofit that connects poor women and youth to training and employment in the digital economy. "Baird has a great corporate culture of collaboration, and that extends to collaboration with and on behalf of the community," he stresses. "We often say, 'When our clients win, we win,' and as an extension of that, when the community wins, we win."

Jackson sees a bright future for this union. "There's the company's interest, the employees' interest, the nonprofit's interest, and the interest of the community beneficiaries of the nonprofit, and all of those have lined up in a really beneficial way," she says. Or, as she sums it up, like any strong marriage, "We're both hoping to bask in the reflection of our partner."

For more information, visit www.shfb.org or www.rwbaird.com.

