



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## MEDIA RELEASE

### *Northern Illinois Food Bank Honored for Leadership in National Pilot Express Stamp Program*

ST. CHARLES, ILLINOIS – (April 11, 2007) – Northern Illinois Food Bank has been recognized for its leadership in finding new ways for hungry neighbors to access food. Recently, NIFB received The Illinois Nutrition Council Community Service Award and was a finalist for Lumity's Annual Technology Leadership Award. Both honors were granted for NIFB's leading role in the Express Stamps Program.

NIFB is the only food bank in America piloting the Express Stamps Program – an internet based application process for food stamps that takes the application opportunity directly to where most people go for emergency food assistance – NIFB's network of local food pantries. Volunteers using laptop computers with wireless phone cards assist needy people in applying for benefits. Applicants' information is transmitted to the Illinois Department of Human Services' database to verify eligibility for benefits. If the candidate qualifies, he/she is given a LINK card, and within several days the individual will receive, by mail, a PIN number that upon activation gives immediate access to food at local grocery stores.

The Food Stamp program has provided benefits to many people, yet, it had a major flaw – it didn't reach all eligible Americans due to the fact that applicants had to go to State Human Service offices to apply for benefits. In Illinois, only 55% of eligible candidates get Food Stamps. To rectify this problem, Northern Illinois Food Bank entered into discussion with America's Second Harvest and the USDA Food and Nutrition Services to find a better way to provide access to food stamps to those in need.

"The Express Stamps program has done two very important things," said H. Dennis Smith, NIFB Executive Director. "It has reduced the time it takes for a person to get the food stamp benefit from five or more days to several days. And most of all, it has taken the application process to where the people are who need the help most – to the food pantries. We are proud to claim a place in history for finding new ways to help our hungry neighbors gain access to food."

In the pilot's first five months of part-time operation at five local pantries, more than 400 LINK cards with over \$60,000 in food benefits have been provided to needy families. NIFB will be expanding the program to two more pantries in April 2007.

The **Illinois Nutrition Council Community Service Award** is an honor bestowed upon individuals and agencies for their leadership and support of nutrition programs and physical activity for Illinois families. The Interagency Nutrition Council (INC) includes representatives from DHS and other agencies who work with the USDA Food and Nutrition Programs and non-profit organizations involved in food security and nutrition issues. INC's mission is to promote health and wellness through nutrition education, coordination of services and access to nutrition programs so that Illinois residents can achieve food security. The participating programs share successes, collaborations and plans for working together to coordinate promotion, outreach and nutrition education projects across the state and across programs.

**Lumity's Annual Technology Leadership Award**, presented by Accenture, recognizes agencies for using technology in innovative ways. Lumity, formerly the IT Resource Center, is a nonprofit organization that catalyzes Chicago's nonprofit community to do more good work. Its services include high quality and affordable services tailored to the needs of Chicago-area charities. Lumity helps to illuminate the community by enabling hundreds of nonprofits do their good work better, through the application of relevant technology and financial tools. Lumity is also the home of a range of special programs meeting nonprofits' particular needs, including CompuMentor/Chicago, which matches technologically-skilled volunteers with nonprofits needing specialized technology assistance; NPO.net, an online information service for the philanthropic sector that includes Chicago's premiere nonprofit job posting site; and the Community Technology Center Accelerator, which addresses the Digital Divide by providing assistance to community technology centers throughout the Chicago-area.

**Northern Illinois Food Bank**, a member of America's Second Harvest – The Nation's Food Bank Network, acquires donated food from retailers, manufacturers, corporations, and community resources and distributes it through its network of over 520 food pantries, shelters, soup kitchens, and other nonprofit food assistance sites to help the 275,008 people living in poverty in 13 northern Illinois counties including Boone, DeKalb, DuPage, Grundy, Kane, Kankakee, Kendall, Lake, McHenry, Ogle, Stephenson, Will, and Winnebago Counties. Northern Illinois Food Bank has been committed to helping feed hungry people for more than 20 years. For more information on NIFB, please call 630.443.6910 or visit [www.northernilfoodbank.org](http://www.northernilfoodbank.org).

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