**Feeding Frenzy: A Florida Teen Won't Let Leftover Food Go to Waste By Peter Ames Carlin**

WHEN 15-YEAR-OLD DAVID LEVITT makes his weekly appearance at the Haven of Rest food bank in Pinellas Park, Fla., he is greeted as a Good Samaritan. "The Lord will repay you," declares mission worker Eric Fridrichson, helping Levitt unload the 45-pound boxes of canned fruit, rice and sugar he has brought from a nearby Publix supermarket in the family minivan. Levitt enjoys the work—"It's cool," he says—but what he'd really like are Mom's car keys. "Hey," he asks her hopefully, "can I drive?"   
 He may not be quite old enough for that, but no one knows better than Levitt how to get food to the hungry. Since 1994 the surplus food-sharing program he designed as an 11-year-old for the Pinellas County public schools has sent more than a quarter-million pounds of cafeteria leftovers to the county's shelters and food banks. Singled out for praise last year by President Clinton, Levitt, a freshman at Seminole High, is currently backing state legislation to protect donors of surplus food from liability lawsuits. "It's a no-brainer," says State Rep. Dennis Jones, who is shepherding Levitt's bill toward certain passage when the state legislature meets next spring. "You wonder why it's taken so long for someone to do it."   
 The same question crossed Levitt's mind in 1993, when he first read about Kentucky Harvest, a nonprofit organization that funnels leftover food from restaurants and other businesses to charities. He was only a sixth grader, but Levitt understood that a nation that regularly sends 30 million people to bed hungry shouldn't toss nearly 20 percent of its edible food into the garbage. Buttonholing Osceola Middle School principal Fred Ulrich outside class one day, he asked if he could start a Harvest program using cafeteria leftovers. "I figured he didn't know me," says Levitt, "so he couldn't be mean."   
 Ulrich wasn't mean. He was merely realistic, pointing out that district health regulations prohibited using previously served food. ("Red tape, red tape," Levitt sighs.) But, encouraged by his mother, Sandy, Levitt attended a Pinellas County school board meeting and made his case for a local Harvest program. "I'd been in children's theater since I was 8," says Levitt. "I just thought of it as another performance." He not only won the board's approval but a spontaneous ovation to boot.   
 The board's approval, alas, merely gained him entrance to the bureaucratic maze. Next he had to contend with state health-department rules governing the handling of secondhand food. For a time it seemed that packaging requirements would doom the program—the state demanded specific containers, and the schools had no money to pay for them. Undaunted, Levitt wrote to the First Brands Corporation, which promptly shipped eight cases of Glad plastic bags to his doorstep, and on Nov. 8, 1994, Levitt helped make the school's first delivery: cartons of milk and bags of salad for Haven of Rest. "That," he says, "was satisfaction."   
 The younger child (sister Jamie is 18) of Sandy Levitt, a bookkeeper, and her husband, Rich, vice president of a medical-supply company, Levitt grew up in Seminole, a suburb of St. Petersburg, earning A's and B's in school and playing volleyball and a handful of musical instruments. "David's a typical teenager," notes his mother. Eventually he would like to attend the U.S. Air Force Academy and learn to fly. "That's today," he says. "Call me tomorrow—I might change."   
What doesn't change is his ability to make things happen. And while he's fortunate to have a mother who helps push his projects along (Sandy is "the silent driving force," according to her husband), Levitt's energy has won him plenty of fans. "David has drawn attention to hunger and the availability of food in the community," says Mary Dowdell, director of Tampa Bay Harvest. Adds Stan Curtis, the Kentucky stockbroker who started the first Harvest program: "Any parent in America would be glad to have him as a son."   
 Including the First Dad, who invited Levitt to the White House last spring as part of a Points of Light ceremony. Taking his medal from Hillary Rodham Clinton, Levitt wasn't shy about pushing his agenda. "What," he asked the First Lady, "do you do with the White House leftovers?"

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