



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

George Winner

Good Time to Remember 'Venison Donation Coalition'

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The locally based Venison Donation Coalition sums up its core mission this way, “With the downturn of the economy, budget cuts throughout the country, and increased layoffs, more and more Americans are feeling the crunch and being left hungry. Those going hungry are families, children and single parents and the donation of venison can help feed these people.”

It's a perfect reminder here at the start of this year's hunting – and holiday – season. The Venison Donation Coalition is a foundation supported by sportsmen's organizations, of course, but also by corporations, civic and religious organizations, and individual citizens. At a time like now defined by limited resources to address seemingly infinite demands, I'm especially grateful to have the chance to call

attention to the coalition's work.

It was 16 years ago when an area "Hunters for the Hungry" program was prepared to donate 400 pounds of venison for distribution to the needy and discovered that state law at the time prevented them, and other similar groups operating in central and western New York, from doing so. The law in 1993 deemed it illegal to distribute, for public consumption, meat from animals that were not slaughtered under qualified supervision to ensure that the meat was safe to eat. As a result, "Hunters for the Hungry" programs operating throughout New York at that time were being told they couldn't donate over 10,000 pounds of venison to food banks and other organizations providing meals to the unemployed, shut-ins, senior citizens, and other needy citizens.

It just didn't make any sense that hunters weren't allowed to donate perfectly healthy, nutritionally sound food to those who needed and would appreciate such a good meal. So the Legislature quickly acted to establish a program to address the appropriate health concerns and allow the donations to be made before the meat spoiled.

The resulting venison donation program is coordinated today by the Venison Donation Coalition, a broad-based partnership that includes a range of area supporters. Established in 1993 (and then made permanent several years later), the program has allowed sportsmen and women to donate venison and other game to food banks, food pantries, soup kitchens and additional not-for-profit organizations and charities that feed the poor.

Today the Venison Donation Coalition operates statewide. Countless needy citizens have enjoyed nutritious meals as a result. Since the year 2000, in fact, the Coalition has coordinated the collection, processing, and distribution of over 337 tons of venison -- equal to more than 2.7 million servings of highly nutritious, low-fat, high-protein meat -- for distribution by regional food banks.

It's an admirable effort. You can't underestimate the spirit of commitment and giving it encourages. We will continue to develop infrastructure, promote tourism, improve schools, protect citizens, and do anything and everything possible to enhance our economic standing, but along with these fundamental responsibilities we also have a responsibility to the quality of life for everyone.

That's what's important, appropriate, and meaningful about this ongoing work. So as the 2009 hunting season continues -- and as we celebrate this holiday season -- it's meaningful to remember the Venison Donation Coalition. Anyone seeking more information [can visit the Venison Donation Coalition online](#), or call 1-866-862-3337, or write to the coalition at: 415 West Morris Street, Bath, New York 14810.