Ray Buchanan: Inspiring teamwork to end world hunger

After enlisting as a U.S. Marine during the Vietnam War, Ray Buchanan quickly recognized that accomplishing a mission required "commitment to something larger than yourself."

"Almost anything can be accomplished with teamwork," Ray says. "The first thing you learn in the Marine Corps is that you're responsible not only for yourself, but everybody close to you." He also learned that "what you can't do as an individual, you can do as a group."

Over the past three decades, at three charities he founded or co-founded, those principles have driven Ray's mission to end world hunger. Inspired by his vision, those charities have made a huge difference in the lives of hungry people.

The Society of St. Andrew, which he co-founded in 1979 and co-directed for 19 years, distributes 25 million to 30 million pounds of food a year in the U.S.

The Foods Resource Bank, which he helped found in 1999, helps raise $3.5 million to $4 million a year to help people in developing countries grow their own food.

And Stop Hunger Now, which he founded in 1998, has packaged over 204 million meals in 71 countries since it launched its meal-packaging program in 2005.

Central to Ray's hunger-fighting work have been partner agencies. "The more partners you have, the bigger and better the work and the perspective," he says.

Equally critical are volunteers. "I'm as excited about giving people the opportunity to make a difference as I am about actually making a difference in the lives of hungry people," he says. "Today there's a hunger. People really want to be involved in something they know will have an impact."
And by rooting its meal-packaging strategy in the work of volunteers, Stop Hunger Now not only is feeding hungry people but also building the global movement to end hunger. "Engaging them in the meal-packaging process is an introduction to how easy it is to end hunger," Ray says. "When people package meals, they can see they can make a difference."

Born in Houston and raised in Corpus Christi, Ray joined the Marines after a year of college in Texas. After mustering out as a sergeant, he received a bachelor's degree in philosophy and religious studies, and English, from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington.

Then, as divinity graduate student at Duke University, he began working with the poor and hungry. He continued that work at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, where he received his master's degree in divinity, and as a pastor at five rural United Methodist churches in Virginia. As a pastor, Ray joined the effort to save the lives of starving Ethiopians during the 1973-75 famine in Ethiopia.

Central to Ray's hunger work has been the recognition that "ending hunger is more than just feeding people." So Stop Hunger Now "focuses its feeding programs in areas where we can see transformational development," he says.

Stop Hunger Now distributes meals through feeding programs operated by partner organizations in developing countries that promote education, encourage children to attend school, improve students' health and nutrition, address gender inequalities, stimulate economic growth, fight child labor, and are part of the movement to address global issues.

"Without Stop Hunger Now, kids will not come to school," is a message Ray has heard repeatedly from many teachers at many school-feeding programs in developing countries. "If they don't come to school, there's no education. Without education, there's no hope, no future for our nation.' I hear this over and over."

Hunger is a global scourge that affects two-thirds of the world's population. In a world with more than enough food to feed everyone two or three times, Ray says, hunger is morally unacceptable.

"The biggest impediment to ending hunger in the world is a lack of political will," he says. "Feeding people will never end hunger. Until we decide to end hunger, we never will."

Ray Buchanan embodies the ideal of a servant leader. And he understands that volunteers and organizations working together can build a global movement that will stimulate the political will to marshal the resources that are essential -- and available -- to eradicate hunger.

"Our meals provide more than food," Ray says. "They provide hope. That's the key to ending hunger."