

**Bridgeport, Hartford, New Haven, Art & Life, Farms, Food & Drink**

## Bridgeport Resident Brings Food to Food Deserts

— Laura Arman, 8.3.2024



Bridgeport

“Fridges won’t [solve food insecurity]” said Reggy Saint Fortcolin in his first interview with CT Examiner.

But they can help.

**Bridgeport**, the community fridge that Saint Fortcolin founded, said the fridge has been reaching 1,200 people weekly in Bridgeport.

It's not Saint Fortcolin's first attempt at alleviating hunger. Before Fortcolin introduced the idea of the community fridge, he was part of **Bridgeport Mutual Aid**, an organization established at the start of the pandemic so that neighbors could help one another find resources.

"When COVID first started, we were driving around dropping groceries to people who were food insecure; undocumented people, elderly people," Fortcolin said.

In its first year, Bridgeport Mutual Aid delivered 13,000 bags of groceries.

Saint Fortcolin helped transport food for a year and half — and started to notice some patterns.

"There are places where everyone in the block were food insecure, there's no buses, there's no grocery store, there's flooding, etcetera," Fortcolin said. "So, I spent a decent amount of time looking at maps."

There was one Bridgeport neighborhood that struck him the most: The Hollow.

"The Hollow ... is one of the highest in regard to immigrant population and one of the lowest in regard to everything else, like income per capita [and] housing ownership," said Saint Fortcolin. "It hits all those negative things."

Around 21% of The Hollow's residents are **foreign born**, and another 19% are not US citizens.

The neighborhood's **median household income** is \$24,473, compared to the national average of around \$71,000. Nearly 30% of the population is under the federal poverty line.

Saint Fortcolin thought putting a fridge outside would be a direct way to help food insecurity in the area.

And so, the first fridge – Fridgeport – opened at The Hollow's 218 James Street on May 1, 2021.

Saint Fortcolin eventually introduced the concept of the communal fridge to the communities in New Haven and Hartford.

The community fridge in New Haven – **Fridge Haven** – located in 242 Dixwell Avenue, opened in September 2021, while the community fridge in Hartford – **Fridgeford** – located in 280 Vine Street, **opened** in November 2021.

No one actually owns the fridges; certainly not Saint Fortcolin himself.

“The idea is not to have ownership or hierarchy over it,” said Saint Fortcolin. “None of them are under my authority, they are all community building exercises ... it's self-sufficient; run by the community.”

## Passing Laws and Helping Farmers

Fridgeford is not Saint Fortcolin's only food-related project in the Capitol. Despite having no formal training in policymaking, Fortcolin was able to pass four bills at the state level addressing food insecurity.

The most recent was **Bill 6854**, which authorized the state to hire a food and nutrition policy analyst responsible for creating a program to help people find food or get government assistance for food and tracking

areas where there is a lot of food insecurity. The bill also lets cities and towns give tax breaks for two years to grocery stores that open in places that are considered “food deserts.”

As of 2022, about 13% of Connecticut residents were food insecure – more than 468,000 people, of which 112,600 of them **are children**.

Saint Fortcolin is also working extensively with Black and Brown farmers in Connecticut. He has been trying to protect and buy land for Black and Brown farmers through the Sovereign Land Trust to create more avenues for local food systems to reach communities.

“People don’t have land to make their own food,” Saint Fortcolin said.

Although a third of the people in Connecticut identify as people of color, they represent **less than two percent** of the farmers in the state.

Although Saint Fortcolin has a full-time job as a conservation outreach manager in a land trust, he still finds time to work on food-related community projects.

“I’m just there wherever they need me,” he said.

**Laura Arman** 

 [laura.arman@ctexaminer.com](mailto:laura.arman@ctexaminer.com)

Copyright © 2024 • Design by Julia Balfour, LLC

---