

Davis stares into the face of hunger

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Ana Davis remembers her first Thanksgiving holiday in the United States.

She remembers the heaps of delicious food. She remembers the mass of leftovers. And mostly, she remembers tearing up when some of it went into the trash.

"I had never seen so much food," Davis said. "I knew people who didn't have any food."

A native of Colombia, Davis grew up in a middle-class family with her parents, two brothers and a sister. Her mother an optometrist and father a salesman, Davis' close-knit family lived comfortably in Cali, and later Palmira.

"Colombia is a very poor country," Davis said. "My parents provided for us, but every day, I saw entire families begging for food."

Davis serves as the new board chairwoman for Loaves and Fishes, a Greenville-based mobile food rescue organization that aims to provide solutions to hunger and reduce waste in the community.



Ana Davis

Family: Her and her husband, Jerry, have three children.

Fun fact: She loves doing Zumba and traveling to Colombia to visit family.

Involvements: Loaves and Fishes, Greer Relief Agency, the Greer Chamber and the Spartanburg Human Resources Association.

The nonprofit rescues perishable food items, such as those left over from a corporate or social function, and delivers the food to a local organization that feeds the hungry. Refrigerated trucks will pick up the food and deliver it to shelters, after school programs and other entities around the county.

Davis, the business manager for Godshall Professional Recruiting & Staffing, felt compelled to join the nonprofit seven years ago. After moving to Greenville, Davis realized she didn't need to be in her native land to see hunger — she found it in the Upstate, too.

Earlier on in her marriage, Davis and her husband, Jerry, wanted to adopt a child. They waited three years before getting the call. The agency had 8-year-old twin girls living in Greenwood that were in need of adoption.

The couple had planned on adopting one child, and preferably an infant. But one of the girls was named Casey, the name of her husband's daughter from his first marriage, a daughter who had died at age 17 from a rare muscle disease a few years prior.

"He heard that name and knew we had to adopt them," Davis said. "Looking back, it's amazing how God puts things together. You might ask for one thing, but you'll get it in a different way than you expected."

They decided to adopt Casey and

Jessica, now 14. The girls' paternal parents had been on drugs, and they often went without much support, supervision or food.

"They went two days without food," Davis said. "Mayonnaise was the only thing in the fridge that they had to eat. It left me with this huge passion for feeding the hungry and avoiding waste."

Roughly 61,000 people in Greenville County are food insecure, meaning they do not know where one or more of their next meals are coming from, according to the Feeding America's Map the Meal Gap data.

Davis said her goal as chairwoman of Loaves and Fishes is for every person in Greenville County to know about the organization and its mission. Hotels, restaurants, grocery stores and event companies are all possible clients for excess food pickup services.

Local banker Sam Hunt founded Loaves and Fishes in 1991 to prevent food from going to waste in Greenville. In its first year, 25,000 pounds of food were salvaged and fed to the hungry. In 2012, Loaves and Fishes delivered 1.3 million pounds of food to area agencies.

She said expansion to Spartanburg County could be feasible in the future.

A Greer resident for nearly 20 years, Davis didn't expect to stay in the U.S. when she first arrived. Equipped with \$500 and a recently obtained college

degree in finance and economics, she came to visit a friend in South Carolina for the summer.

She didn't speak much English at the time. Davis joined the Greenville Literacy Association's free English as a Second Language program, enabling her to speak fluently. She took classes with people from Europe, Asia and South America. Her classmates became her comrades.

"We all came from different places and spoke different languages. The only language we had in common was English, and we were all just learning it," Davis said. "We bonded over learning the culture, the language."

Davis decided to stay. She accepted a position as a bilingual client resource at the Greer Commission of Public Works, where she met her husband of nine years. She went on to earn her master's degree in human resources and management.

Davis later became a recruiter, and now the business manager, with Godshall Professional Recruiting & Staffing in Greenville. Davis said she thinks she's finding her balance with her career, family and nonprofit work.

"To truly be involved with a nonprofit or in the community takes a lot of time, so you need to feel good about it," Davis said. "This concept is so simple, yet it makes such a big difference." ☞

