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# Loaves & Fishes launches app that allows clients to order groceries for pickup at distribution center

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By **DAVID SHAROS**  
NAPERVILLE SUN | MAR 17, 2022



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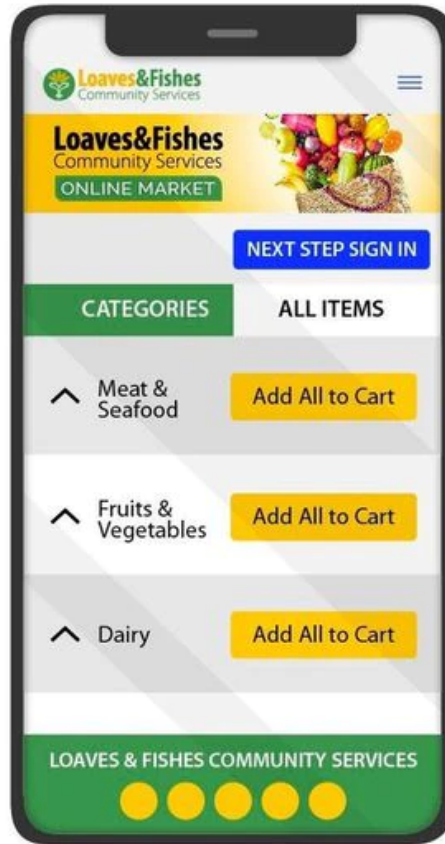
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Naperville food pantry Loaves & Fishes' new app allows clients to use their phone to place grocery orders for pickup at the nonprofit's distribution center in Aurora. (HANDOUT)

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A new Loaves & Fishes app allows clients to place food orders electronically and select a pickup time that works with their schedule.

Known as the Loaves & Fishes Online Market, items can be preselected and the order filled for pickup at the Naperville nonprofit's distribution center at 580 Exchange Court in Aurora.

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The system is not unlike what grocery stores offer as a convenience for customers who don't have the time or means to do traditional shopping, Loaves & Fishes President/CEO Mike Havala said.

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"We wanted to have something for people too busy working or maybe having three kids at home and couldn't find the time to get to the food pantry," Havala said.

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"We started looking at getting this app two to three years ago. We started talking to some of our clients about this and found that about a third of them said this was something they would actively use," he said

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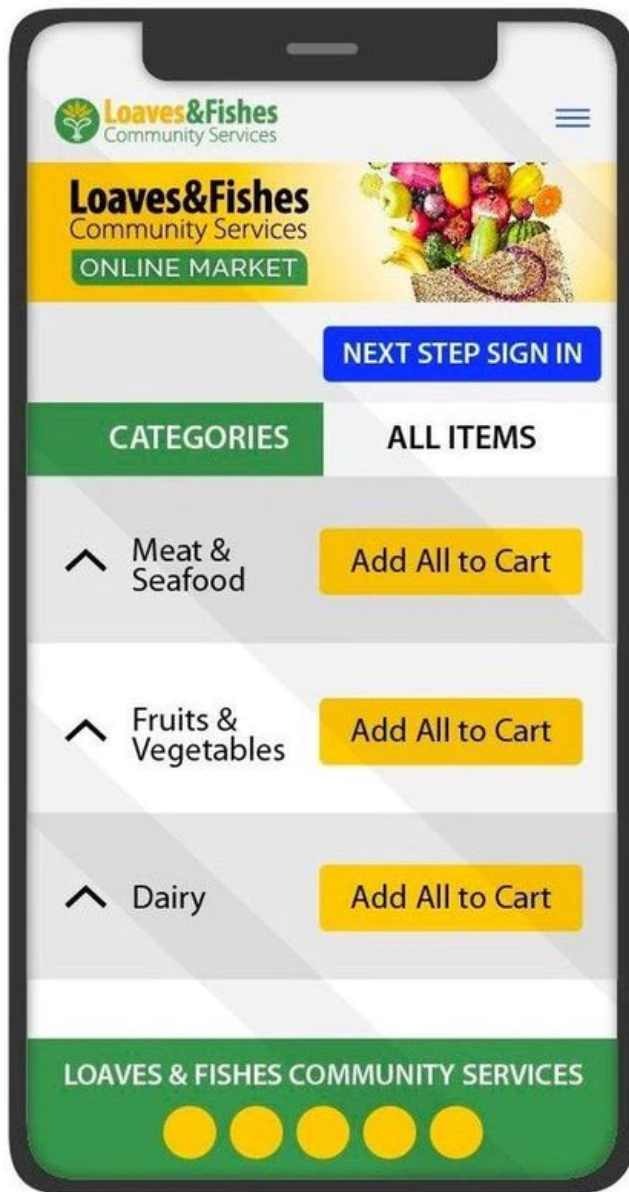
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The software was developed about a year ago and launched at the beginning of this month. With the addition of the new distribution center, which not only allowed Loaves & Fishes to increase its inventory but expand its reach into Kane and Kendall counties, such a system became feasible.

"We rolled things out about two weeks ago and have already filled orders for 100 families," Havala said. "With an average of four per family, that's food for about

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Naperville food pantry Loaves & Fishes' new app allows clients to use their phone to place grocery orders for pickup at the nonprofit's distribution center in Aurora. (Loaves Fishes / HANDOUT)

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“It might take an hour to drive to the Naperville site, shop, load the car and then drive home,” he said. “With the online (system), perhaps a friend can pick up the food boxes or someone can borrow a car and be back in 20 minutes. So we see this as something that provides a lot more flexibility.”

Volunteers at the distribution center are available to fill the grocery orders and get them out to clients.

“We still have people come in and shop as usual at the Naperville site while the online orders are filled exclusively in Aurora,” he said. “Like at Amazon Fresh and other sites, you do need people to go through the areas and fill orders and we’ve been really fortunate to have volunteers who have stepped up to do that.”

It’s also a boon to those who don’t have transportation because they can have an order picked up for them by someone who does have a car, Havala said. And the whole process should save people time.

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“It’s important to us that people know this isn’t something we developed just for ourselves,” Havalala said. “Any food bank can use it as it’s a multi-tenant software. We’re happy to have other partners contact us and we’ll direct them to the software company for licensing, which is very inexpensive.”

Despite the new option, there is no mandate that clients use the system. The Naperville food pantry at 1871 High Grove Lane in Naperville remains open and available for traditional shopping.

To sign up for the app, go the Loaves & Fishes website at [lffood.org](https://lffood.org).

*David Sharos is a freelance reporter for the Naperville Sun.*

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