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Shown above are the efforts that aid those who are less fortunate within The Graphic-Advocate area, such as the Lake City Union Church Food Bank, the South Central Calhoun Elementary Food Pantry in Rockwell City and the Christmas Benefit Committee, based in Lake City. [Tyler Anderson/The Graphic-Advocate]

HELPING THE LESS FORTUNATE

Local food pantries, organizations help others at Christmastime

By Tyler Anderson
The Graphic-Advocate Editor

On Thanksgiving, the Lake City Drive-In held its Community Thanksgiving Dinner, providing meals to those who were unable to see family, friends or loved ones – either due to COVID-19 precautions or other circumstances. The free will donation dinner was to lend a helping hand to three community organizations.

When Larry Irwin – the owner of the Lake City Drive-In – considered his options, he chose the Lake City Union Church Food Bank.

On Dec. 10, Irwin presented a \$2,000 check to the Lake City Union Church's food pantry, which will al-

low the organization to purchase non-perishable food for families in need for sustenance.

The Lake City Union Church Food Bank is not alone in helping those who are in a tough spot and working to get back on their feet, joined by the Lake City Food Pantry, New Opportunities-Calhoun County Family Development Center, the SCC Elementary Food Pantry and the Christmas Benefit Committee.

Three organizations are based in Lake City, and two are centered in Rockwell City.

To help out those who are less fortunate this holiday season, The Graphic-Advocate wants to provide the gift of good information by

introducing these organizations.

The Graphic-Advocate also wants provide the means to reach out to either donate toward these causes or reach out to receive food and other necessary items in a current or potential time of need.

Lake City Union Church Food Bank

A block over from the Downtown Square, the Lake City Union Church Food Bank is a donation driven endeavor with food purchased from the Food Bank of Iowa.

These care packages of food, packed in boxes, are delivered to the church on the second Thursday of every month. The distribution of these packages is

from 2:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. on every second Thursday of the month from the church.

People receiving the boxes need to meet the State of Iowa SNAP guidelines. The number of boxes received is based on family size.

Among the packages are meat, canned vegetables and other necessary food items. The food bank is also able to bring in milk and eggs every month, and whenever available the pantry orders produce, such as apples, oranges, potatoes, onions and the occasional sweet potatoes and squash.

"We're a once a month program," said Kristi Jacobs, one of the organizers of the pantry. "It's not something that will last a long time, but will supplement what people

have. We give them cereal, fruit, vegetables, pasta and pasta sauce."

Jacobs has been one of the food bank's overseers since 2015, alongside Michael Jacobs. Paige Reiter and Mary Reiter also help out in day to day operations.

The program caters to families and elderly. Currently, they are limited to outside services with less than 10 people volunteering at the church, due to COVID-19. Usually, the church has plenty of volunteers, which include SCC High School counselor Brian Knapp and the Leadership Development Class, to help the food bank.

FOOD PANTRY from page 1

Around this time of year, the demand of the food bank has gone up.

"We were running in the mid-90s for the number of boxes we gave out," Jacobs said. "Right now, we have 111 boxes. Last month, we had 106 boxes. Generally, we see an increase in the wintertime."

When she sees the faces of those who receive the boxes, Jacobs understands why it is so important to the community.

"When we see the people who come in to pick up food, we know that it's important," Jacobs said. "Anyone who has a lot of kids who don't have enough food in the house, it becomes a real issue. We have a lot of senior citizens who are on a fixed income. Anything we can do to help, is a plus for them."

"We love seeing people who appreciate it, and I can tell you, they appreciate it," Jacobs added.

For more information on the Lake City Union Church Food Bank, you can either call (712) 464-3221 or email unionch@iowatelecom.net.

Lake City Food Pantry
Inside of Woodlawn Christian Church, located at 200 North Woodlawn Avenue, is the Lake City Food Pantry. The pantry's hours are from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

"It's a local, community food pantry," said Eileen Miller, Director of the Lake City Food Pantry. "We serve all of the communities within the South Central Calhoun school district, primarily Yetter, Lake City, Lanesboro, Lohrville and surrounding communities."

It's Miller's first year of overseeing the pantry.

Its inventory consists of a variety of canned soups, meats, vegetables, fruits, pastas, sugar, cooking oil, frozen meats, margarine. The pantry also carries a supply of household items such as toilet paper, paper towels, Kleenex, liquid dish soap, liquid hand soap, shampoo, conditioner, deodorant and toothpaste and toothbrushes.

"We depend on donations of money, food and other goods from members within our community," Miller said.

Even though the pantry doesn't have a refrigerator, customers are provided with a voucher from the Lake City Food Center. From the voucher, items such as milk, eggs, bread, cheese and meat can be purchased.

Within the last month, Miller stated that the pantry has been hit or miss.

"It's hard for me to say," Miller said. "It's either people are unaware, or they are getting their sup-

plies elsewhere. We do try to accommodate people. If people don't have a way to get here or lack transportation, we can deliver."

Nonetheless, having the food pantry is of importance, and seeks to complement other places.

"It's twice a week where people can come," Miller said. "We offer another option, and provide other items. Having supplies, such as toilet paper and paper towels, are important, too. There are neighbors who have lost their jobs, are going through a rough time or don't have much of an income from their jobs. We're here for them."

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 situation, the Lake City Food Pantry asks to call ahead to set up a meeting time for curbside delivery. For more information or to set up a delivery time, please contact Miller at (712) 464-4473.

"People can call us at any time," Miller said.

New Opportunities, Calhoun County Family Development Center

Located at 334 Richmond St. in Rockwell City, is the New Opportunities-Calhoun County Family Development Center. Its food pantry serves all income-eligible clients in Calhoun County. The food pantry can be accessed at any time during the regular center hours of 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. from Monday through Friday. However, the center is closed from noon to 12:30 p.m.

"We have a food pantry on site," said Heidi Billmeier, Director of the Rockwell City-based facility. "We also provide holiday gift baskets, put together a few baskets for Thanksgiving. Those are a big thanks to NEW Cooperative, and donations from individuals and organizations throughout the county. We also buy food from Lake City Food Center, as we work to keep everything local."

According to Billmeier, NEW Cooperative provided hams, which are the centerpiece of the gift baskets.

"We also receive donations from the Jeff and Deb Hansen Foundation," said Billmeier.

Throughout the year, the food pantry is supported through local food drives, personal donations and purchases through the Food Bank of Iowa in Des Moines. Families in need of food place their food pantry order over the phone and are scheduled for a pick up time.

When inventory allows, families also receive non-food items like toothbrush, toothpaste, laundry soap and other personal care products.



On Dec. 10, Lake City Drive-In owner Larry Irwin (center) and representatives from the Lake City Union Church Food Bank gather together for a donation picture. Pictured (from left to right) are Joe and Jolene Steig, Paige Reiter, Mary Reiter, Irwin, Kristi Jacobs, Michael Jacobs, Jerry Snyder, Bonnie Snyder, Jim Feld and Pam Feld. [Tyler Anderson/The Graphic-Advocate]

Other programs that New Opportunities provides include LIHEAP (Low-income Home Energy Assistance Program), Christmas toys, holiday meals, utility crisis assistance, back-to-school supplies, financial literacy counseling, clothes and other closet items.

"We're more than just a food pantry," Billmeier said.

As the holidays loom closer, business has been picking up. Along with families, New Opportunities has seen more elderly and single individuals schedule appointments with the development center.

"Usually the week before Christmas break, families are anticipating for their kids to be home at that time and request a little more assistance," Billmeier said. "The State of Iowa, with the food stamps program, has really helped families. Recently, we have seen more elderly and single person households. For Christmas, we're trying to help as many people as we can."

Above all else, New Opportunities is an information hub for individuals and families. The frequency of donations from individuals and organizations is quite often.

"Weekly, we get something from somebody," Billmeier said.

New Opportunities also takes to social media to share what's needed within the food pantry.

If you have questions about any of our programs or would like to donate to one of these essential programs, please contact Billmeier at (712) 297-7721. New Opportunities also provides curbside service in either pickup or drop off.

SCC Elementary Food Pantry

On the east side of Rockwell City, there is a familiar building. South Central Calhoun Elementary School, which seeks to educate young students throughout the area, also

has a food pantry within the Golden Buckle of the Corn Belt.

According to SCC Elementary School Principal Nicole McChesney, the food pantry's purpose to alleviate students and their families when it comes to grocery bills or when tightening the belt.

"The food pantry is actually for all families with students at SCC," McChesney said. "They do not have to be low-income or meet any other criteria. Families can use the pantry as a main source of food as a way to take a load off of their grocery budget, or to supplement their household pantry when kids are home over Christmas vacation. Some families use it regularly."

"Others use it when life throws them an unexpected vehicle repair bill," McChesney added. "Or, the pantry is handy if there is a smaller paycheck, due to a COVID-19 related absence. We have single parents and grandparents who are caring for children, and even school staff who take advantage of this resource."

Since the elementary school's pantry is part of the Food Bank of Iowa, it has a very low impact on the district, as a whole. "The majority of items are provided by the Food Bank of Iowa, at no cost to the district," McChesney said. "Other items are donated by individuals or civic organizations. We also receive cash donations, which we use to purchase non-food items such as dish soap, shampoo, and toilet paper."

However, participation within the pantry has been low this year. Should this issue persist, it could be shuttered at the elementary school. Alongside its fellow food pantries, McChesney stressed that the SCC Elementary Food Pantry is a vital piece of the community.

"No student in our district should be hungry, nor should they worry about whether or not their next meal will be there," Mc-



A representative from the Food Bank of Iowa delivers a pallet of non-perishable food during the latest dropoff on Dec. 10 at the Lake City Union Church. [Tyler Anderson/The Graphic-Advocate]

Chesney said. "If the SCC Elementary Food Pantry prevents even one child or one family from going without food, its purpose will have been met. That being said, participation is low, especially this year. If this continues, we will have to re-evaluate whether or not there is a need in our community to maintain a pantry."

To either donate or receive help from the SCC Elementary Food Pantry, you can contact McChesney at (712) 297-8621.

Christmas Benefit Committee

While many organizations provide food, personal items or services can be provided to those in need, the Christmas Benefit Committee is a seasonal occurrence. The committee is to ensure that Christmas is indeed merry to those who are unable to provide gifts during the holidays.

Working from the education wing of St. Mary's Catholic Church in Lake City, the Christmas Benefit Committee and its donors work with the Lake City Police Department to keep the holidays a time of blessing and joy.

"We've been doing this for a long time," said Judy Hungate, who is a current and original committee member. "We always had six members. It's a great group of ladies."

Along with gifts, the committee provides gro-

cery vouchers from the Lake City Food Center. It's a win-win for both giver and receiver, as it streamlines time for the committee and still provides plenty of food during a winter break.

"We have groups and individuals who donate to the project," Hungate said. "Then, we have people who adopt families. It's all done through anonymity."

The committee steps in and aids families in other times of the year, in times of emergencies and crises.

Along with gifts, the Lake City Union Church pitches in with a hat and mitten tree and local businesses provide donation boxes, where people can place new or gently used items. Civic organizations also take part in the committee's activities.

According to Hungate, the Christmas Benefit Committee's presence is a massive benefit to the overall community.

"It's really important," Hungate said. "For people who buy the gifts, it's a 'feel-good' thing. It makes your heart feel good. For people who receive these packages, I can't imagine a family of four not being happy with the essentials, grocery vouchers, toys and gifts."

To donate and help families in need, one can send in a donation to the United Bank of Iowa, under the name of "Christmas Benefit Fund."

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