



BY ALEX MORRELL • AWMORRELL@GREENBAYPRESSGAZETTE.COM • OCTOBER 17, 2010

Green Bay food pantries expect season to be 'busiest ever'

With the economy still slumping, Paul's Pantry of Green Bay is gearing up for a record number of visitors this holiday season.

And the biggest difference director Craig Robbins has observed this year is more than just numbers — it's attitude. The people he serves are losing hope.

In the past year, economic improvement and jobs still haven't come, and many people face another holiday season in poverty.

"Last year I think people were still somewhat hopeful that things were going to turn around and this wasn't going to last very long," Robbins said. "Many of the people that are unemployed have become so disappointed and so discouraged that some are giving up looking for work."

Paul's Pantry is in its 26th year of providing food for about 150 families per weekday. Robbins expects that number to jump to 200 to 225 families by Christmas time, a bump related to rising utility costs and living expenses in the cold weather.

"We expect it to be the busiest ever; that's what we're planning for," said Robbins. "We're seeing more everyone. It's not any one group of people."

Paul's Pantry isn't alone. The Brown County Salvation Army has also seen increased use of its food pantry.

The number of families it serves jumped by 400 this summer over last, according to community relations director Meghan Diemel.

The Salvation Army thrives on volunteer help throughout the year, but monetary donations are crucial to meet the expanded need in the holiday season.

"Not everyone has a ton of time these days, it seems, to be able to come to the site and donate their time," Diemel said. "We always are very thankful for any monetary donations that come in."

Paul's gets three-quarters of its donations in fall, Robbins said, and thanks to the generous Green Bay community, donations have kept up with the growing need so far.

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That hasn't stopped Robbins from organizing outreach events to broadcast the need to Brown County residents.

Community leaders and area students gathered Friday at Paul's Pantry in Green Bay to observe World Food Day and highlight the bleak outlook facing many of Brown County's unemployed.

World Food Day is a global event focused on fostering awareness, understanding and informed year-round action to end hunger.

Robbins put the burden on Green Bay residents to ensure the less fortunate don't go hungry this year. With the money saved on groceries, families can spend on rent, higher utilities or holiday gifts, Robbins said.

"It's a day to rededicate ourselves to our mission to make sure no one in Brown County goes hungry," Robbins said. "It kicks off the season of giving so to speak."

Paul's Pantry is also teaming up with the Packers Women's Association and Festival Foods to hold a food drive today prior to the Green Bay Packers-Miami Dolphins game.

Stock the Shelves

To ensure local food pantries meet the need this season, the Green Bay Press-Gazette has also started a "Stock the Shelves" initiative to drive donations.

The Press-Gazette partnered with the Greater Green Bay Community Foundation and three other organizations to stock the shelves of local food pantries in Brown, Door, Kewaunee and Oconto counties.

The J.J. Keller Foundation, Express Convenience Centers and Brown County credit unions will be matching donations to the Stock the Shelves campaign with the goal of raising \$75,000 to help the hungry of the greater Green Bay community.

Residents can donate online by visiting the www.greenbaypressgazette.com/stocktheshelves.

For those donating food, local pantries said the most helpful items they receive are high-protein, all-in-one meals and nonperishable items like pasta dishes, canned stews, potatoes, peanut butter and cereal.
