

Souderton Independent

THE VOICE OF THE INDIAN VALLEY — SINCE 1878

Food drives help restock Keystone Opportunity Center pantry, but need is growing

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Nov 20, 2019 Updated Nov 20, 2019

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Scooter's Bike Shop Cranksgiving Bike Ride and Food Drive rider Julie Wallace purchases items for the Keystone Op

SOUDERTON — The almost bare shelves at Keystone Opportunity Center's food pantry on Main Street in Souderton are once again full with the help of two major food drives.

The Scouting for Food collection by local Scout groups brought in 12,200 pounds of food and household items such as detergents, with the Scooter's Bike Shop Cranksgiving Ride and Food Drive hauling in another about 5,000 pounds. Both were held on Nov. 16.

That's a big help, but still adds up to only a small part of what's needed year-round at the pantry that distributed 258,840 pounds of food last year, Keystone staff members say.

"Those shelves will be empty in a matter of weeks and we'll have to do it all over again," said Alan Raisman, Keystone's manager of advancement.

"Once the holidays are over, we're still here," he said. "Our clients are still coming through our doors and our programs are still running."

Both the Scout and Cranksgiving collections brought in more food than last year, he said.

"As much as we love seeing the events grow year on year, it's important because, unfortunately, the need grows year on year," Raisman said.

Cindy Dembrosky, the food pantry's manager, has been with Keystone for 10 years.

"Last month was our highest number of households served since I've been here," she said. "We served 287 households and all those people live in Souderton [Area] School District."

No one specific reason was identified as the reason for the increase last month, she said.

"It's been going up slowly, but steadily," Arlene Daily, Keystone's executive director, said.

Before last month, the highest number of households served in any month this year had been 266, Dembrosky said.

The number of senior citizens on a fixed income coming to Keystone for assistance is increasing, she said.

This year's Scout food drive brought in the most from that drive since 2017, Raisman said.

It was double the amount received last year, Dembrosky said.

One of the possible reasons given for less food being collected in last year's Scout drive is that the Scouts stopped giving out bags to be used in the collection.

This year the bags were back, Dembrosky said.

"The troops and packs that worked with us distributed over 4,000 bags," she said. "They actually went out and bought the bags themselves."

Ten Scout troops participated in the collection, Raisman said. Another 35 community volunteers helped with weighing and sorting the items collected, he said.

Cranksgiving, now in its second year, had about 90 bicyclists, a release about the ride said. The ride starts at Souderton Community Park, with riders given the options of taking a five-mile family route or 20- or 30-mile routes. Along the way, the riders stop at Landis Supermarkets in Telford and Vernfield to purchase food for Keystone's food pantry.

"The cyclists ranged in age from 5 to 75 and came from as far as Philadelphia, Lansdowne and Emmaus. They braved 32 degree temperatures and brisk 15 mile per hour winds as they navigated the courses," the release said.

Five pick-up truck loads were brought to the pantry from the Cranksgiving collection, Dembrosky said.

Along with those two drives, Keystone recently had a Thanksgiving meal bag donation drive to which 495 meal bags were contributed, Raisman said. The bags are distributed through the food pantry and Fresh for All, he said. The weekly Fresh for All distributions are 1 to 2 p.m. Tuesdays at Grace Bible Church in Souderton.

This year's winter coat drive brought in 400 coats from auto dealerships and community members, Raisman said. The coats are distributed throughout the winter months, he said.

Keystone also has a gift card collection, Daily said.

"We are able to give those to our clients to help them get through the holidays with a little bit of assistance to be able to buy gifts for their children or buy an extra meal," she said.

Along with the food donations and volunteer help, monetary donations are essential to keeping the organization's programs going year-round, Daily said.

"One bag of groceries, one Thanksgiving meal, or a coat for the winter is helpful, but the funding that sustains the programs that keeps people going all year long is really what changes lives," Daily said. "That'll have the greatest impact on helping people sustain themselves for a long period of time."

Along with the food pantry, Keystone provides educational programs.

Donations may be made through www.keystoneopportunity.org. A list of immediate needs is posted each Friday on the website, Raisman said.

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http://www.montgomerynews.com/soudertonindependent/news/food-drives-help-restock-keystoneopportunity-center-pantry-but-need/article_b18ce47a-0bca-11ea-882e-2b548ed6c348.html