



Helping those in need this giving season

By Barry VanderKelen

During the week leading up to Christmas, many nonprofits increase the amount of food, clothing, and toys they give to needy families. These increases are motivated in part by a spirit to help others, and because the requests for assistance are growing.

In South County, more than 700 families have received Christmas baskets. Providers coordinate their efforts to make sure resources help as many people as possible.

Among the largest providers of baskets are St. Patrick's Catholic Church in Arroyo Grande, Five Cities Christian Women Emergency Food Ministry in Grover Beach, and the Salvation Army Services Extension in Grover Beach.

Preparation at St. Patrick's begins in September. According to Katie Hilton, an outreach coordinator for the church, four people serve as cochairs of the event, who in turn recruit a full team of volunteers. Donations of food and toys are solicited throughout the fall with a special push beginning after Thanksgiving.

Distribution was completed last Saturday, and volunteers worked approximately 1,000 hours to collect items, sort them into packages, and distribute them to needy families. This year, 360 baskets were distributed, an increase of nearly 10% from last year. The ongoing food distribution program of the church serves approximately 400 families per month.

Five Cities Christian Women distributed another 72 baskets by Tuesday. Fern Schlicht, president of the organization, reports that this is 20 more than they have ever given out in the past. The organization distributed bags of food the recipients can prepare at home. More than 7,500 bags have been distributed in the first 11 months of the year. This organization draws volunteers from 16 churches in the Five Cities and Nipomo areas.

Hilton and Schlicht report that requests for assistance are more than can be fulfilled. The inability to store more food properly limits how much assistance these organizations can provide. The Food Bank Coalition is a source of some food, and all three organizations rely on monetary donations in order to purchase more. Both programs receive donations of food from individuals and grocery stores.

Christian churches and organizations lead many, but not all, of these efforts. For instance, Grass Roots, a nonsectarian emergency food pantry in San Luis Obispo, has given out approximately 130 Christmas baskets this year. These baskets include fresh food, toys and poinsettias.

Grass Roots is one of the last to distribute baskets and coordinates with organizations throughout the county. These baskets are distributed on top of its normal food distribution activities. Peggy Fowler, executive director of Grass Roots, says that this is the giving season and the baskets are given in that spirit.

Losing a job is the primary reason families seek assistance, they say. Fowler adds that many people with low-income jobs are negatively affected by rainy weather, meaning that requests come from more families during the winter.

Sadly, the many food distribution programs do not meet the growing need for food in our county.

To all of you who volunteer or donate so that our neighbors will not go hungry, I say *thank you*.

Resource Use

- Support nonprofit leadership
- Board development/training
- Strategic planning

Nonprofit Business Column of The Tribune

The San Luis Obispo Tribune publishes a column every other week in the Business section dedicated to the business practices of nonprofit orgs. Barry VanderKelen, Executive Director of the San Luis Obispo County Community Foundation writes the bi-

weekly column to help strengthen nonprofit organizations in the community. Each column is reprinted here as a one-page handout for use by local organizations. Barry can be reached at 543-2323 or by e-mail at barry@slocf.org.