

Front Page Story - Published November 24, 2008

Small shelter gives big for holiday

Light House distributes 100 Thanksgiving baskets

By ELISHA SAUERS Staff Writer

As early as 6 a.m. today, volunteers arrived at Light House homeless shelter on West Street to unload truckloads of food and pack boxes full of Thanksgiving groceries to feed about 100 local families.

The Light House provides food baskets for Thanksgiving and Christmas to individuals on the shelter's food pantry list. This year the shelter is giving out 55 Butterball turkeys in addition to side-dish fixings. And for those who don't get a turkey, the shelter will give a \$25 grocery store gift card, said Bob Moore, the volunteer heading up the morning's activities.

Mr. Moore, who has been assisting with the Thanksgiving basket drive for four years, was in a cheerful mood as he oriented new volunteers on the process.

"We like live turkeys here," he joked. "You wanna know why? We don't have enough room in the refrigerator."

Along with the turkeys or gift cards, the shelter also packed the baskets with ingredients for pie, canned vegetables, soup, cranberry sauce, pasta, canned fruit, stuffing, potatoes, bread mix, gravy, and an assortment of other snacks and staples.

In the small living room of the facility, a couple of volunteers pushed furniture up against a wall to make room for stacking sacks of food items. Three cars with unexpected visitors pulled up at around 8 a.m. with extra pantry goods that had to be wedged against a coffee table and TV console.



J. Henson - The Capital
Volunteer Patrick McCoy, of Annapolis, stacks boxes of non-perishable items to be distributed for the Light House shelter's Thanksgiving giveaway. The groceries are for the Light House homeless shelter, which plans to provide Thanksgiving dinners to about 100 families.

Meanwhile in a cramped hallway just wide enough for two people to pass, other volunteers created an assembly line to fill up boxes. With the size of the shelter being a challenge in itself for the event, only 12 baskets were pre-prepared for the day because of limited storage space. The rest would be packed as the day continued.

"We received close to 300 calls from people wanting to volunteer this year," said Marilyn Baker, the shelter's development director. "A lot of people think this is a big, huge soup kitchen. We actually had to turn people down who wanted to help because we just don't have the space."

Stephanie Nevin, one of the 10 volunteers, learned about the opportunity to get involved this summer when she and her fiancé were strolling down West Street.

"We just stopped in one day to find out how we could help out, either serving food or by donating food," she said. "We wanted to do something really fulfilling, something local on a regular basis."

Ms. Nevin and another volunteer sat in one of the front offices, calling individuals registered on the Light House pantry list, notifying them that their baskets were ready for picking up.

Ms. Baker said she was particularly pleased with the response she received from those wanting to participate in today's event.

"I think with the economy being what it is, the spirit of Thanksgiving is really being felt in the Annapolis community this year," she said.

Angela Jones was one of the first individuals to receive a basket this morning. She said the food will help her put together a holiday meal combining her family with her sister and nieces.

"They help me every year, probably for the last 10 years," Ms. Jones said. "It helps a lot, it really does."

Many local businesses sponsored the event by providing food items, Ms. Baker said. The Naval Academy, Bank of Annapolis, Key School, Veruna Spa, Arundel Federal Bank and The Unitarian Church made significant food donations for the baskets this year.

In addition to the Thanksgiving basket distribution, the shelter will also continue the holiday spirit into the evening. Light House residents will attend a free Thanksgiving Dinner from 4 to 9 p.m., hosted by We Care and Friends, at the Stanton Community Center.

Mr. Moore said many of the people receiving food would be coming throughout the day on foot, bicycles, friends' cars and buses.

While Ms. Jones waited in the lobby as a couple of volunteers helped her load her car trunk with a bag and a box of groceries, she said she had much to be thankful for this holiday season.

"I'm thankful for life itself, really just waking up," Ms. Jones said. "Family and friends, my kids."