

## Article 20.

# Calvary Food Pantry: Volunteers essential to our mission

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My last article, at Christmas time, was to remind Auburn of the wonderful help I get from the churches, individuals and businesses, such as Lowes on Grant Avenue, that gave my families approximately 800 toys that had been collected from 130 associates, over the holiday season. I entered the New Year with an 89th birthday from Betty C., again, one of my volunteers who sits at the pantry's desk and welcomes people to the pantry. She acts like she is 70 years young. She has done her work with gracious charm, gaiety and kindness for over 25 years. In the spirit that Betty approaches her life (with a finely-tuned funny bone), I am reminded that my volunteers are my life blood. I would not exist, nor be able to help the hungry of Auburn, without this broad spectrum of residents, who cut a wide, large swath in temperaments, abilities and political where-with-all. Most of the volunteers come from RSVP (Retired Senior Volunteer Program, Senior Corp.). It is an organization that services the community in many ways, and has been in Auburn, since 1973. Under the guidance of Mary Ann Kolo, I am lucky to have these volunteers on my team. An example of an extraordinary dedication is Marge R., who takes the bus two times a week from Skaneateles and then walks five blocks to my pantry.

I have told you in a previous article how the volunteers are so necessary to my work. Let me explain, again, what they do:

All people coming into my pantry have to sign in. This method tells me that we help approximately 331 individuals a month with 4,965 meals given out.

Then:

At the front desk, Betty, Marge, Mary Lou or Janice have to initially determine that the person sitting in front of them lives in the pantry's demographic area. (This is a regulation begun four years ago by the Food Bank of Central NY, but since Jan. 1 of this year, enforced here at the pantry.) Once my volunteers decide he or she live in the area, Calvary Food Pantry can then provide food to that person or family.

All volunteers at the front desk will ask what they want for the week. Our position is that the pantry will provide three nutritional meals for five days, no matter how large the family. Note, if a hungry person is outside our area, we will still provide food, initially, and then direct them to the food pantry in their demographic area.

A menu is created from a check list of food, based on the person's needs.

Betty, Marge or other volunteers will ring the bell and volunteers will then go into the pantry's cupboard and pick all food requested.

The food is put into plastic bags and then given to the individual.

Betty then goes on to the next person. All is coordinated work that only experienced volunteers can do it. New volunteers, who just join us, stock the cupboard for future reference.

Additionally, any one can go to the large Pantry's food rack in the center of the room. Fruits and vegetables are delivered, on Mondays by the CNY Food Bank's Rescue Program and placed in huge bins and put on the rack for easy pickings. Our greeter provides all guests with additional plastic bags. On Thursday nights, volunteers pick up from Panera Bread, who since they opened in Auburn, has supported my pantry. All food on the racks is free to take.

Looks simple? NOT AT ALL!

I have to plan and coordinate weeks ahead. There has to be enough food at all times. That is my job. The food also has to be purchased. For instance, Hudson Eggs gives us a small discount each week and delivers them to us. I try to keep my refrigerator full.

I work 40 percent of my time on getting grants. Then there is the help from the Food Bank of CNY, an organization that charges me very little, considering what I am getting. I am always looking for sources of funding, from our chicken barbecue on Labor Day weekend, to Tupperware parties and Denny fundraisers. We even asked individuals in Auburn to help in our first major campaign last year and some people actually stepped up to help us. We expect to be better, in 2015.

Also, when the Food Bank of CNY truck comes to fill the cupboard, twice a month, at least eight volunteers have to be present to unload these additional goods. My volunteers willingly show up and help unload.

This goes on three days a week, week after week. My heroes this month are my unheralded volunteers, who believe in my mission and bring comfort to my people who are in silent despair and distress. Hunger can strike easily and it preys on the helpless. My volunteers know this and help me with compassion and helpfulness. Additionally, each volunteer is reinforced by those around them who have to same purpose and goals, and come away with the satisfaction of giving to a cause they believe in. Thank you to all.

Pantry News: Pete Montrose, a farmer in Cayuga County, has selected Calvary Food Pantry to receive \$2,500 from Americas Farmers Grow Communities, the Monsanto Fund. This was totally unexpected and we can't thank him enough.

Remember: Volunteer, donate, or reciprocate in kind. Come visit us, if you can.