

~ The Advocate Asks ~

Volunteers talk about the community spirit and good will that motivated them to be a part of the Saugus United Parish Food Pantry's Annual Thanksgiving food drive

Editor's Note: We spent some time last Saturday (Nov. 17) morning in the basement of Cliftdale Congregational Church to observe the operation of the Saugus United Parish Food Pantry's annual Thanksgiving food drive. The Saugus Advocate interviewed organizational leaders, some of the longtime food pantry volunteers, several Saugus High School students who chipped in to help and newcomers who have recently begun participating in this good will project that brings the community together. Highlights from last week's interviews follow.



Aaron Crawford, the music director at Cliftdale Congregational Church, made the 70 mile-drive from Concord, N.H., to Saugus to help out at the Saugus United Parish Food Pantry's annual Thanksgiving food drive last Saturday. (Saugus Advocate photo by Mark E. Vogler)



A core of volunteers pitched in to help the Saugus United Parish Food Pantry's annual Thanksgiving food drive last Saturday. (Saugus Advocate photo by Mark E. Vogler)

Q: Please tell me a little bit about this year's Thanksgiving food drive, Pastor Joe.

Cliftdale Congregational Church Pastor Joe Hoyle, who organized his third Thanksgiving food drive during the five and a half years he has been officiating the church: We have 138 families signed up this year, an average of 2.5 people per family. Last year, we had 90-plus, so we are serving about 40 more families this year than we did last year.

Q: Sounds like there's a greater need for the turkey meal this year.

Pastor Hoyle: Yes. There's been a greater demand. Everything I had projected that we needed, we exceeded. And we had to order more turkeys – 138 turkeys we got this year – that's the most since I've been director [of the Saugus United Parish Food Pantry].

Q: So, this is your third year.

You've been doing it since Wendy Reed passed away. Do the volunteers and the people who come here to the Food Pantry still talk about Wendy?

Pastor Hoyle: Oh yes. Wendy was a legend. We still talk about her. Wendy is still a part of our work here.

Q: So, how is it working out today? How many people do you have down here helping out? And what's the age range?

Pastor Hoyle: We have a total of about 20 volunteers, ranging from the age of elementary and high school students to senior citizens – may be from 10 years old to 80-plus. During an average Friday morning at the Food Pan-



The husband and wife team of Pastor Joe and Debbie Hoyle of Cliftdale Congregational Church worked behind the scenes to organize the Saugus United Parish Food Pantry's latest Thanksgiving food drive. (Saugus Advocate photo by Mark E. Vogler)



Joining the volunteers at the annual Thanksgiving food drive were Saugus High School seniors Braden Faiella and Madi Femino. Braden is a captain on the Sachems football team and Madi is a captain on the girls' soccer team. (Saugus Advocate photo by Mark E. Vogler)

try, we will average about 10 to 12 volunteers. But for this event today, it's at least 20, maybe up to 25.

Q: So, where do donations come from to put on a food drive like this?

Pastor Hoyle: A lot comes from The Greater Boston Food Bank. And we get donations locally from individuals and various organizations – some of them that put on food drives to help us.

Q: So, could you serve more families in need locally for something like this?

Pastor Hoyle: Everybody has to register ahead of time and we have time slots for them to come and pick up their meals. We do order extra in case a few people who didn't register come in at the last minute, but we usually have enough.

Q: So, what does it cost collectively, to put something on like this?

Pastor Hoyle: Probably

\$7,000 to \$8,000 – the fresh produce comes to about \$3,000 and the turkeys add up to about \$2,500.

Q: And with that, you are able to put a Thanksgiving Day meal on the table for all of the needy families you hear about?

Pastor Hoyle: We don't turn anybody away. They don't have to be residents of Saugus, but the vast majority of our clientele is from Saugus.

Q: What does the meal you give out consist of?

Pastor Hoyle: The turkeys average out to about 11 pounds.

Q: Please tell me what's in the boxes.

Pastor Hoyle: Green beans, celery, a bag of apples, onions, carrots, squash, a jug of apple cider, a bag of potatoes and a bag of cranberries.

Q: What's in those bags you are giving out?

Pastor Hoyle: Canned green beans, canned corn,

stuffing mix, desert mix, cranberry sauce, cornbread mix and mashed potatoes.

Q: So, how long have you been helping needy families from this basement?

Pastor Hoyle: The Saugus United Food Pantry has been supporting our community for at least 20 years. The Thanksgiving meals have been going on for at least the last 10 years or more; and the planning for this day starts in early October when we start taking orders from needy families.

Q: What kind of feedback do you get from people who received the Thanksgiving meals?

Pastor Hoyle: The people we serve regularly show gratitude. They thank us for what we do here. We do it to serve and hope that we can help bring better days to hard situations. That's what we do it for.

Q: Honestly, could you serve



Mitch Boyer and David Odgers gathered up some of the 138 turkeys that were given away to needy families from the basement of Cliftdale Congregational Church last Saturday (Nov. 18) during the Saugus United Parish Food Pantry's annual Thanksgiving food drive. (Saugus Advocate photo by Mark E. Vogler)