

WVDP food pantry delivery project continues to grow

- By Kellen M. Quigley, Managing Editor, Nov 21, 2018



Volunteers from West Valley Demonstration Project deliver food to the Saving Grace Outreach Trading Post South in Cattaraugus last week as part of the company's annual food drive project. Submitted photo

SALAMANCA — In the spirit of the holiday season, volunteers from the West Valley Demonstration Project (WVDP) and its subcontractors gathered Friday at Sander's Parkview, taking the time and energy to once again distribute food to nine local food pantries.

This year's WVDP Food Drive fundraising effort was responsible for the distribution of 108,000 pounds of food — including 360 turkeys — to area pantries, according to volunteer coordinator Lettie Chilson, exceeding their goal for 2018.

Over 25 people volunteered to help deliver the food Friday, she said, and nearly everything was donated, including the trucks to transport the pallets and turkeys.

"Do we have to deliver 108,000 pounds a food today? No," Chilson said. "We do a grocery run for Thanksgiving, and then after the accounting is done and final counting is done, the food pantries will get an additional allotment of food and distribution in December."

Forty turkeys will go to each of the nine food pantry sites at Ellicottville, Franklinville, Delevan, West Valley, Little Valley, Cattaraugus, South Dayton and two pantries in Springville, Chilson said. She said she surveys each pantry and creates a base list of what they will receive.

"We try to give everybody at least enough to get them through the holiday distributions," she said. In addition to the turkeys, Chilson said each pantry gets a pallet of food with basic staples and holiday items such as stuffing. Some may also have identified a special needed item, which may be brought in by those who donate food instead of cash.

"For example, West Valley was in need of cereal," she explained. "So a lot of people brought in cereal and that cereal will go to West Valley."

The food drive began more than 25 years ago as a drive just for the local West Valley food pantry. Since then, the efforts from WVDP has grown and so has the the event.

In that time, Chilson said the biggest change has been the increase of donations and service because the need in the communities remained. She said the need is seen especially in the elderly population.

"What really has changed is the generosity of our folks," she added. "We've downsized a lot. We have fewer people at the site, and they still manage to hit a very aggressive goal every year."

Between the two trucks and teams of people assigned to each of the pantries, Chilson said it would take about three-and-a-half to four hours to complete the deliveries after leaving Sander's Parkview.

For about a decade, Parkview has been a part of the project. In the past two years, that's where the turkeys have come from, Chilson said, although places like Walmart in Springville have donated the turkeys previously as well.

"That partnership has been fabulous," she said of Parkview. "They palletize the food for us and give us great deals on the provide cost, and they also make a very nice donation."

Chilson said many other partner companies and contractors have been vital over the years. She said some provide the trucks and drivers for the deliveries while others do their own food collections.

Joe Pillittere, communications manager for WVDP, said in just his two years working at the WVDP site, the amount raised has increased by about 5,000 pounds.

"The thing is the employees enjoy this. I enjoy this," he said. "It's their opportunity to give back, and you can't beat that. Most of our employees are here on their day off because it's that important."

Since its inception through 2017, Pillittere said 1.8 million pounds of food have been distributed from this volunteer program through the West Valley Demonstration facility.

They're hoping to have 1.9 million total by the end of the season, he said, but it could be more with late donations.

"Most people see a plant and it's just a plant. They see concrete, they see buildings, but there's people there," Pillittere added. "This is a way of showing there's people there that care about the community."

Chilson said she looks forward to the project every year. It's a lot of work, she said, but delivery day makes it worth it from all the hugs, tears and help that come from the pantries.

"We like to know that we're not just giving to a general Western New York area, but we're giving to the area that is our neighbors directly around the plant," she said. "It benefits the people that live next door to us in our communities."

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