

WVDP food drive collects 120K pounds for local pantries

By Kellen M. Quigley | Managing Editor



In the spirit of the season, volunteers from the West Valley Demonstration Project and its subcontractors delivered over 120,000 pounds of food Friday to local pantries right before the holidays.

Press photo by Kellen M. Quigley

To help spread some holiday cheer during this time of year, volunteers from the **West Valley Demonstration Project (WVDP)** and its subcontractors gathered Friday at Sander's Parkview in Salamanca to once again distribute collected food to nine local pantries.

This year's fundraising effort included food and monetary and in-kind donations from the employees themselves and was responsible for the distribution of what amounts to 120,000 pounds of food, according to volunteer coordinator Lettie Chilson, including 360 turkeys.

The turkeys and pallets with about 80,000 pounds of food would go to each of the food pantry sites in Ellicottville, Franklinville, Delevan, West Valley, Little Valley, Cattaraugus, Dayton and two in Springville.

“Parkview puts the pallets together so that each pantry gets an identical pallet,” Chilson said. “The loose items that are donated are sorted and given out later. They’ll be getting some of that at Christmastime once we reconcile all the donations.”

The food drive originally began 30 years ago as a way to serve the West Valley pantry and primarily began as a goods drive. Now, Chilson said they get a lot of cash donations to help buy large portions of food at discount rates. She said the drive has grown every year with 2020 exceeding their goal once again.

“The challenge is the prices go up and the need goes up,” she continued. “We try to set the goal to do at least what we had done the previous year, and the community has been great in supporting it.”

This year’s other challenge was working around the coronavirus pandemic, but Chilson said it was still a success. She said they had to figure out social distancing and delivering in a safe manner between WVDP’s and the pantries’ volunteers.

“Donations were hard with COVID and teleworking,” she added. “People weren’t present for all of it, but they still managed to participate.”

In addition to the food pallets from Parkview, WVDP also partnered with Walmart in Niagara Falls, which donated the turkeys, Chilson said. The in-kind donations include three drives from WVDP’s vendors that collect canned goods and cash that come in after.

“The community also matches a lot,” she said. “Some of our contractors will challenge their employees and match their donations, so it’s really grown.”

Since WVDP began doing the drive more than 25 years ago, nearly 2 million pounds of food has been distributed to pantries throughout the area from the volunteer program.

“The services pantries provide with the food and getting people connected with services they need, they’re essential to our communities,” Chilson said. “We need to keep our pantries going not just for the food they provide but because they make that connection with people who normally wouldn’t have found themselves in need, and that’s now more than ever.”

As for doing it with the volunteers from **WVDP**, Chilson said it helps keep the project local and serves their neighbors directly.

“We think that community outreach is important,” she added. “All the people at the site value volunteerism and community outreach, as you can tell by the success.”