

## WVDP volunteers deliver food to local pantries for 32nd year



Photo by Deb Everts

Volunteers from the West Valley Demonstration Project and its subcontractors met Nov. 12 at Sander's Parkview to load and deliver donated food to nine area pantries prior to Thanksgiving.

By DEB EVERTS

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SALAMANCA — To spread good will for the upcoming holiday season, employees from the **West Valley Demonstration Project (WVDP)** and its subcontractors gathered Friday at Sander's Parkview to once again distribute food to nine local food pantries.

Led by Lettie Chilson, WVDP facility manager and food drive coordinator, the group loaded the food donations onto one large rental truck and a few pickup trucks that will help hundreds of families in need during this holiday season.

John Rendall, president and general manager at WVDP said approximately 120,000 pounds of food, including 400 turkeys, was delivered at food pantry sites in Ellicottville, Franklinville, Delevan, West Valley, Little Valley, Cattaraugus, Dayton, Springville and Concord.

Rendall said the food drive continued last year in spite of the pandemic. He said they have a long-standing tradition of doing this food drive that started in 1989 and has been held every year since.

According to Rendall, the amount of money collected has grown each year, but the amount of food has been pretty constant. He said they have been going to these nine pantries for the last seven years.

“What has changed is we used one truck this year, instead of two, so we did one long route,” he said. “In the past, we’ve gone out with two trucks, one to the east and one to the west, but otherwise we are pretty consistent.”

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Joe Pillitere, communications manager for WVDP, said having one truck keeps everybody together because all the volunteers follow and they get the deliveries done in less time. “Another nice thing about this is everybody is using their day off to volunteer,” he said. “It’s also a social thing that gives everybody a chance to connect with each other.”

The volunteer group included Bob Chilson, Darren Boone, Joe Pillitere, Herick Nelson, Kevin Murray, John Rendall, Karen Rendall, Dave Schuman, Schuman volunteers, Lettie Chilson, Scott McCabe, Larry Myszka, Peggy Loop, Brandon Myszka and Elizabeth Lowes. Cattaraugus County Sheriff’s Deputies, Steven Dombeck and Matt Deboy assisted the group on their journey, along with students from Cattaraugus Little Valley Central School.

Rendall said the food donations come from the employees and subcontractors, mostly in money, but some food. They also accept donations from the general public. They take the donated money to Sanders Parkview and order the food. He said Parkview employees package the food and load it onto the truck for them.

“The food pantries are delighted to have us come with the truck,” he said. “We give them a good charge of food and we fill the pantries right up. It really takes care of the pantries to get them through the holidays.”

Not only does this collected food cover Thanksgiving, but it also carries over toward the Christmas holiday with leftover funds. Rendall said they apply those extra funds directly to the pantries so, when their food runs down, they can buy additional turkeys and food to restock for the Christmas season. Rendall said WVDP has a very generous and caring workforce. The employees live in this area and they are helping their extended neighbors. He said they do it out of gratitude and compassion for their fellow neighbors.

“The impact it has is very tangible. We have hungry families out there that need assistance putting food on their table, particularly this past year-and-a half with COVID,” he said. “It’s been very tough on a lot of families in Cattaraugus County and also Erie County.”

“Every year during the holiday season, resources get spread thin and the needs of our community increase,” Pillitere said. “Community support from the WVDP Food Drive helps to meet those needs that may have gone unmet during the holiday season.”

Rendall said the pandemic did not have an impact on people volunteering for last year’s food drive. They stepped right up and they had a very robust group of volunteers. They were all masked up and worked through the controls that were in place. Even the donations came in as usual, in spite of the pandemic.

According to Rendall, this annual tradition began as a food drive for the local West Valley food pantry, in 1989, and WVDP has been doing the drive for over 30 years. He said Chilson has been coordinating the volunteers for about 25 of those years.

“Since the drive’s inception, we’ve collected more than 2.1 million pounds of food that has been distributed from this volunteer program through the West Valley Demonstration facility,” he said.

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