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WVDP volunteers deliver over 110K pounds of food to area pantries



By Deb Everts

To spread goodwill for the upcoming holiday season, employees from the **West Valley Demonstration Project (WVDP)** and its subcontractors gathered at Sander's Parkview on Nov. 15, volunteering to once again distribute food to nine local food pantries, including Fellowship Hill Ministries and the Concord Food Pantry in Springville.

Led by Lettie Chilson, WVDP facility manager and food drive coordinator, the group loaded the food donations onto two trucks provided by subcontractor American DND. Then, they split into two different teams to deliver hundreds of cases of food and turkeys to area food pantries.

Other area pantries include Delevan Methodist Church, Catholic Charities Outreach, Franklinville; Saving Grace Outreach, Cattaraugus; Master's Plan, Dayton; United Church of Christ, Ellicottville; Little Valley Baptist Church; and West Valley Food Pantry.

The goal this year was to collect 100,000 pounds of food – enough to provide turkeys, holiday items and staples for the nine food pantries. Chilson said this year's Food Drive exceeded last year's goal and they collected 111,000 pounds of food, including 400 turkeys, which will help hundreds of families in need during this holiday season.

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According to Chilson, the workforce of the WVDP completed its Annual Food Drive on Nov. 14, as part of their continued commitment to the community. This year's Food Drive/fundraising effort included food donations from employees themselves and was responsible for the distribution of the food to area pantries.

"The food that was loaded on the trucks Nov. 15 at Sander's Parkview was just a representative of all the thousands of pounds of food that has been donated and will be distributed prior to Thanksgiving Day," she said. "The food pantries we service are basically those that make a ring around our site [WVDP] and those pantries give service to our neighbors and the community. It's important that we keep it local."

Chilson said Sanders Parkview and Walmart Inc., in Springville, partner with WVDP in turning donated cash into food. Because Walmart provided a great price for the volunteers, she was able to buy 400 turkeys from the store this year.

Chilson said they gave Sander's Parkview a shopping list for the pantries. Based on that list, the store bought and assembled all of the food for delivery. She said the store also donated a portion of the grocery bill back to the project.

"All the project participants, including subcontractors, U.S. Department of Energy (USDOE) and New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA), all donate items," she said. "Several of our subcontractors have smaller drives to bring in food or donated money."

Not only does this collected food cover Thanksgiving, but it also carries over toward the Christmas holiday. Chilson said when the final accounting is done, they'll buy additional turkeys for the Christmas season for all the food pantries.

"The initial delivery includes 400 turkeys and it'll be almost equal that for Christmas," she said. "Once the accounts clear, we'll split the remaining up between all the food pantries, which will be enough to buy another 40 turkeys for each pantry for Christmas."

Joe Pillittere, communications manager for the West Valley Demonstration Project, said the drive changes yearly. He said they collect more food each year, so it gets bigger and better every year.

"I am honored to be a part of an event that makes a difference in our community," said CHBWV President and General Manager Scott Anderson. "The amount of food collected year-after-year demonstrates the generosity and kindness of our employees."

According to Chilson, 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 25 years. She said more than 1.9 million pounds of food has been distributed from this volunteer program through the West Valley Demonstration facility since its inception.

Chilson said all the volunteers are employees of the WVDP and its subcontractors. As members of the team, they have embraced this event as their big team effort charity for the year.

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“It’s about giving back to our neighbors,” she said. “It demonstrates the positive impact that kindness can have on a community.”

Pillittere said the bottom-line really is this type of effort from employees, subcontractors, and their partners at the **USDOE** and **NYSERDA** really helps build the quality of life for not only the employees but the community itself.

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

A special thank you goes out to the following employees and members of supporting businesses and organizations: American DND; Buffalo Fuel Corporation; Butler Construction; Cattaraugus County Sheriff’s Department; CH2M HILL BWXT West Valley (CHBWV); FRHAM; Health Works; International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, Lodge 2401; InTomes; MJW; Sanders Parkview Supermarket; Springville Country Club; Test America; Walmart; and U.S. Department of Energy and New York State Energy Research and Development Authority.