

Letter Carriers Food Drive helps replenish food bank shelves



By Amy Nile Herald Writer

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LOCAL NEWS LOCAL NEWS



Six semi-trucks were packed with food and other necessities to be delivered to those in need across Snohomish County this summer.

The [Letter Carriers Food Drive](#) takes place every year on the second Saturday in May at post offices across the county.

Local letter carriers collected yellow bags filled with nonperishable food and toiletries that people had left by their mailboxes. Food banks rely on these donations to feed people, especially during the summer when donations slump and kids are out of school.

Volunteers at four area locations unloaded mail trucks, sorted the groceries and packed them into large boxes to be hauled away in the semi-trucks.

Lisa Matson, a Lynnwood volunteer, was carefully packing boxes, putting the heavy items on the bottom and the lighter ones on top. She wanted the food to look just as it would if had come straight from store shelves.

“It’s hard to bring a smashed loaf of bread home to your kids,” she said through tears.

When she was growing up, Matson said, her family ate because of a food bank. She’s also used a food bank to feed her children when she’s fallen on hard times.

Now that Matson is employed as an administrative assistant, she wanted to give back.

“This is what I need to do.” she said. “There’s care in these boxes.”

Matson’s daughter Victoria Philp, 15 and her friend, Marissa Prater, 16, also pitched in.

They worked alongside another mother-daughter team, the [food drive’s long-time coordinator](#), Chris Kelly, a Lynnwood mail carrier, and her mother, Ruby Robert, 75, of Bothell.

Kelly said her goal every year is to recruit more volunteers and to collect more food.

This year, the letter carriers were hoping to bring in 300,000 pounds of food. They put out 250,000 yellow bags in hopes that people would fill them with food or a monetary donation. Kelly said she’d be happy with one can of food in each bag.

Steve Holtgeerts, of Hogland Transfer Company, provided four 53-foot semi-trucks and paid the drivers to pick up the food volunteers packed at various locations in Everett, Lynnwood and Edmonds.

“This just what we do every day,” Holtgeerts said.

The food is taken to the Hogland warehouse in Everett where it is stored at no cost to the nonprofits. Drivers then deliver the donations in smaller loads every other week until the food is gone. It usually lasts for about three months.

Sara Haner, a spokeswoman for the United Way of Snohomish County, said Holtgeerts is the “backbone” of the effort. She credits the drive’s success to his generosity over the past 20 years.

The local drive was organized by United Way, the National Association of Letter Carriers Local 791, the Snohomish County Labor Council and Volunteers of America Western Washington.

About 115 volunteers helped at different post offices throughout the county. Youth and community groups, businesses and labor unions sent volunteers to pitch in.

The donations are needed this time of year, Haner said. During the school year, free and reduced-price meals are a safety net for many families. But during the summer, some don’t have access to meal programs, which strains the family food budget.

VOA estimates that one person out of seven in Snohomish County is “food insecure.” That means they have trouble affording groceries and other necessities, Haner said.

“That one in seven — that’s your neighbor, that’s your friend, that’s your aunt,” she said.

This month alone, more than 48,000 people visited a Snohomish County food bank, according to VOA.

Last year, local letter carriers collected 248,506 pounds of food, Haner said. That amounted to half of all the food donated in 2014 by the public for local food banks, [according to VOA](#).

The local effort is part of a national food drive. About 210,000 letter carriers across the county collected donations on Saturday for the Stamp Out Hunger food drive in more than 10,000 communities.

Bob James has carried mail since 1979. Despite the sore shoulder that comes with carrying the heavy canned food along the route he does on foot in Mountlake Terrace, he said, he’s happy to lend a hand.

“We’re more than willing to do it,” James said. “It’s being part of the community.”

In case you missed it, the letter carriers will still collect the bags Monday or next Saturday in Snohomish County.

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A vertical promotional graphic for Tic-Tac Dough. At the top, the words "\$50,000 Tic-Tac DOUGH" are written in a stylized, bubbly green font with a yellow outline. The background is black with green light rays emanating from behind the text, and several green dollar bills are scattered around. Below this, the text "TUESDAYS IN JUNE" and "GUARANTEED CASH!" is written in large, bold, white, sans-serif capital letters. At the bottom is the logo for "GUIL CEDA CREEK CASINO", which consists of a stylized white 'C' shape with the text "GUIL CEDA CREEK CASINO" inside and below it.

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