

Valdez Food Bank Helping Those in Need

Just stepping into the Valdez Food Bank and seeing the tiny space with shelves starting to fill up for the day's distribution, it was easy to see that this place was filled with more than food. It is filled with a strong desire and commitment to helping those who need a little extra assistance.

I visited the Food Bank on Thursday, distribution day. Volunteers Bev Zecevic, Floyd Nagle, and Doreen Hodges had been there since before 3 p.m. and were busily preparing fresh fruits and vegetables graciously donated by Eagle Quality Center, the local grocery store, and picked up and transported by a designated volunteer. The group would spend the next three to four hours that day prepping fresh food items, stocking shelves, and serving their clients.

When asked why she volunteered at the Food Bank, Bev Zecevic commented, "I volunteer because there are people in our community who don't have the food they need. I am grateful to have the opportunity to help."

Thursday is one of two days that the food bank is open for distributions. Another volunteer crew comes in on Mondays.

The EAFB, commonly known as the Valdez Food Bank, is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that began serving the Valdez community in 1989.

The Food Bank, whose mission is to provide food and emergency assistance for people who are in need is funded entirely by local donations and is staffed entirely by volunteers.

Approximately 30 volunteers make up the core staff and many more individuals and groups volunteer for short term tasks.

In 2008 the 30 core volunteers alone logged 1,400 hours in skilled and unskilled labor to support the Food Bank. "Additional volunteers

by distributing \$56,000 worth of food. They also approved \$10,000 in emergency assistance helping 66 individuals of which 26 were children.

Individuals in need of food need only to complete a simple one-page application and may begin receiving food immediately.

The food bank does ask that individuals make an effort to return the help given to them through volunteer service or by food or cash donations. They also require that individuals and families provide for themselves once they are able so the organization can continue to help as many people as possible.

To receive emergency assistance, the individual must complete a separate form stating the need for assistance. Such

assistance is awarded on a case-by-case basis by the EAFB Board and requires

evidence of actual dire need.

The need for assistance is growing. Handicap access was added in 2008 and the organization is currently working to acquire additional frozen and dry storage space. A remodel of the building coupled with new time-saving procedures will allow better flow of client traffic to accommodate the larger numbers of individuals in a more efficient manner.

This is needed to reduce the amount of time spent waiting outside in line during inclement weather. This new set up will also require less volunteer hours to maintain.

The group plans on adding a 16x16 foot building. Half of the space will be dedicated to dry storage and the other half will have a walk-in cooler/freezer. According to Steadman,



Valdez Food Bank located on the Richardson Highway as you enter town

are always needed and welcome," according to Board member Rebecca Steadman. Currently they are in need of individuals who can help once or twice a month on distribution days and people who are willing to organize and help with food drives.

The Food Bank provides assistance to clients who are underemployed, on disability, on social security, unemployed, or experiencing circumstances beyond their control.

In addition to food distribution, a portion of the budget also provides other types of emergency assistance such as home heating, electricity, dental and vision services, housing, medical prescriptions and treatment and transportation.

In 2008, the Food Bank helped 407 people, 109 of which were children,



Above: Rebecca Steadman receives food donations dropped off by Alyska employees Tom Rich, Karen Stewart, Candi Zastrow, Jesse Warner, and Barry Roberts, as part of the 2008 United Way food drive. Top Right: Doreen Hodges organizing fresh fruit for Food Bank clients. Middle Right: Floyd Nagel prepping fresh vegetables. Bottom Right: Bev Zecevic getting ready for distribution day. Photos courtesy Valdez Food Bank and Sharon Crisp



their freezer and refrigeration unit are both “inadequate to accommodate the needs of the current number of clients and leave no room for expansion of the program.”

One of the difficulties of running the Food Bank is keeping the shelves stocked at all times. After the fall and holiday, donations tend to drop off. They often find themselves short of donated food and funds during the summer months when children are out of school and not receiving hot lunches.

The Food Bank would like to encourage food drives in the spring and summer. This would help the Food Bank overcome this challenge and create enormous benefit to our community.

The largest single contributor to the Valdez Food Bank is the United Way of Valdez and the largest food drive is organized by the Boy Scouts and Cub Scouts. CVEA is proud to be among the Food Bank’s many supporters by contributing energy gift certificates to the holiday baskets and by partnering with CVTC and the Rotary Club on a food drive during Cooperative Month in October.

The city of Valdez also supports their efforts by providing space rent

at a cost of \$1 per year. In 2009, the city of Valdez awarded the Food Bank \$10,000 to help with fundraising, operations & to contract a bookkeeper. This is necessary to provide for the dramatic increase in charitable activities and fundraising that the organization has seen.

In addition, this funding will help provide seed money towards the acquisition of the walk-in freezer and additional storage space.

According to Steadman, “there are too many people to mention and thank here. The Food Bank simply would not exist without the generous contributions from individuals, community groups, organizations, businesses, and churches. Many help with cash donations, food drives, holiday baskets, and more. I am in awe and continuously so proud of this community and the way it pulls together to provide for those less fortunate or who might be going through tough times.”

If you are someone in need, food distribution is Monday from 5:30 to 7 pm and Thursday from 4:30 to 6 pm. The Food Bank can be reached at 835-FOOD.