

# **TOLLESBORO LIONS CLUB SUPPORTS LEND-A-HELPING-HAND FOOD & CLOTHING BANK**

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## **Tollesboro food pantry helps make ends meet**

TOLLESBORO — The crowd of people waiting in lines at the Lend a Helping Hand Food Pantry in Tollesboro Friday was not only a testament to the increasing economic difficulties families are facing, but also the goodwill of a community that volunteers money, time and effort to make sure those families do not go hungry.

The pantry is open twice a month, handing out donated food items as well as commodities. While the demand is consistently high, generally in the 235 to 240 range, the holidays pull a greater number of people to the pantry as families attempt to make ends meet.

In 2009, 370 families came to the pantry for Thanksgiving boxes. George Calvert, president of the Lend a Helping Hand board, said he had hoped to keep the number to around 400 this year. However, judging by the crowd that had gathered by 11 a.m., he said it was more likely that number would hit 500 families.

"There's more need," he said simply of why the turnout could be so much greater.

Calvert explained that while prices have gone up for food, electricity and everything else, most people's incomes have remained the same. Social Security benefits have not increased and unemployment rates remain high. Don Lawson was a perfect example.

"It's hard everywhere," said Lawson, a Vanceburg resident who has not been able to retain consistent employment for several years.

Lawson was injured while working as a cashier at a business in Ohio several years ago when the business was robbed. He was shot during the incident and while the injury did not qualify him for disability income, it made it difficult to find steady work, he said.

Lawson was hired at Super Quik in Vanceburg Tuesday, but with four in his family and the holiday so near, the extra assistance from the pantry was greatly appreciated.

Certain requirements must be met to qualify for assistance, including income requirements. However, proof of income is not required. The person simply has to indicate they are beneath a certain income level for their family size.

A valid ID must be shown and the person must have a piece of mail showing the current 911 address to verify county residency. Once established, the resident can receive commodities. If not, there is donated food available minus the commodities.

Linda Sue Calvert was one of two volunteers manning the desk to screen those who came in Friday. She said the crowd did not surprise her, based on the demand last year and the current need.

Donna Campbell, also of Vanceburg, has been coming to the pantry since it opened six years ago. Her five-member family lives on a fixed income and the food the pantry provides helps make ends meet.

"They just do great things for people," she said of the volunteers.

"They're a blessing to the community," agreed Connie Kent, who was directly behind Campbell in line.

Kent, a Vanceburg resident, has come to the pantry off and on for several years. She said many might go hungry if not for the food pantry and certainly they would not be able to have a real Thanksgiving meal.

Calvert said the pantry had 340 turkeys to give out. Turkeys were donated by the Tollesboro Christian Church, Tollesboro Lions Club, Tire World, the board of directors for Farm Bureau and several individuals.

When the pantry ran out of turkeys, it also had approximately 40 hams to give.

People were given the choice of taking two beef roasts instead of a turkey. Calvert said there were approximately 150 beef roasts to distribute. He said even if the pantry ran out of turkeys, hams and roasts, it had chicken and other frozen meats to supplement.

Also given out were pork sausages, pizzas, Hot Pockets, potatoes and more. Calvert estimated many of the boxes would weigh 60 to 70 pounds.

The pantry was well stocked for Friday's crowds, but within the past year the pantry has also felt the pinch of the economy. Calvert said there was one Friday when the pantry could not open because there was not enough food to give out.

Most of the food is provided by God's Pantry in Lexington, though local donations of food and cash are accepted. Calvert said while there have been times the pantry has struggled, most of the time the need is addressed quickly.

"Sometimes it's just amazing," he said. "We're just blessed."

Calvert said the pantry receives approximately \$1,025 each month from church donations but currently spends approximately \$2,500 per month.

The food pantry relies on volunteers to pack the boxes, organize the crowds of people including traffic control and the lines, and loading the boxes into the vehicles. Inmates from the Lewis County Detention Center assist with loading the boxes into vehicles while organizations like Glenmary Farms, a catholic organization in Lewis County that hosts missionaries from other areas of the country, brings volunteers to help sort the food into boxes. Joe Groseck, vice president of the Lend a Helping Hand board, and volunteer director for Glenmary Farms said the organization is about service immersion. High school and college students from all over the country come to serve, and Thursday, students from Ohio and Wisconsin helped pack the boxes.

Members of various churches and organizations assist at the food pantry.

Debbie Ratliff, a member of Grace Baptist Church in Garrison, said she became involved in the food pantry after a friend told her about it.

"I've had needs before, too, so it's wonderful to give back," she said.

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For more area news, visit [www.maysville-online.com](http://www.maysville-online.com).



***NOTE: The Lend-A-Helping-Hand Food Pantry and Clothing Bank operates out of the Tollesboro High School which was owned by the Tollesboro Lions Club from 1995 through 2009. During the time period the Tollesboro Lions Club owned the Tollesboro High School Property, the use of Gymnasium and Classrooms beneath were donated for the creation and operation of a private, Christian-based School, the Tollesboro Christian School, with the Old High School Building donated for use by the Lend-A-Helping Hand Food Pantry from the date of its origination in 2004 through the date the property was acquired by the Tollesboro Christian School in 2009 (after which the Tollesboro Christian School, which purchased the Tollesboro High School, donated the use of the Old High School Building to continued use by the Lend-A-Helping-Hand Food Pantry and Clothing Bank). When the Tollesboro Christian School closed in 2012, a member of the Tollesboro Lions Club purchased the property and continues to donate the use of the Old Tollesboro High School to the Lend-A-Helping-Hand Food Pantry and Clothing Bank through present day (Jan., 2020 as of the date of this writing).***