

## **Koinonia Benefits from Food Drive Aiming to ‘Stamp Out Hunger’**

**By Theresa Minton-Eversole**

Koinonia’s food pantry recently got a much needed restocking as a result of a generous donation by area postal workers participating in the May 9, 2015, Letter Carriers’ Food Drive, which is conducted annually in recognition of national Stamp Out Hunger Day.

The nation’s largest single-day food drive is conducted on the second Saturday in May in approximately 10,000 cities and towns in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands and Guam. This year, approximately 175,000 city letter carriers were joined by retired letter carriers, by family members and friends, and by countless volunteers, who help collect and distribute sacks of non-perishable food items left next to residents’ mailboxes.

Locally, several dozen volunteers were on hand at Franconia United Methodist Church to receive, sort and transport more than 10,000 pounds of food to Koinonia and its storage facility, where it will be distributed to those in need. The foundation serves the Franconia/Kingstowne/Springfield community by providing food, clothing, learning and emergency financial assistance to more than 2,000 clients each year.

“Girl Scout Troop 3551, Kohl’s Cares volunteers and representatives from numerous area churches were on hand to carry and sort canned goods and other food items,” said Koinonia Executive Director Robert Petitti.

“It’s incredibly hard work, but well worth the effort,” said Koinonia Board Chair Glenn Sutton, a long-time Franconia resident and regular food drive volunteer. “The Great Recession may be over but Koinonia continues to receive requests for assistance each month. Events like this make it possible for us to ensure that no children or adults in our community go hungry.”

Hunger affects about 49 million people around the country, including millions of children and senior citizens. And one in four households with a member currently serving in the U.S. military turns to a food bank for food assistance, notes the National Association of Letter Carriers web site. Pantry shelves filled up through winter-holiday generosity often are bare by late spring. And, with most school meal programs not available during summer months, millions of children must find alternate sources of nutrition.

“This event is one of the most critical sources of food for our clients in need,” said Petitti.

“Every year, I am amazed at the generosity of the Franconia/Kingstowne community who donate so much food to help feed their neighbors in need and in awe of the loving hearts and hands of the many volunteers – children to seniors – who turn out to help sort those donations,” said Michele Sutton, a long-time volunteer who trained and led the volunteers who participated.

“Koinonia has been a gathering place for generous volunteers and donors since the 1960’s,” Petitti added. “It’s amazing to see people work so hard to carry and sort thousands of pounds of donations.”

“We can’t do what we do without the support of our community,” said Petitti.

If you missed the food drive but would like to contribute, Koinonia is still accepting donations of staples such as cooking oil, sugar, flour and condiments; cereal; coffee and peanut butter. In addition, non-food items such as toilet paper, diapers, detergents and cleaning supplies, as well as grocery store gift cards are needed.

For a list of the times the foundation can accept donations visit <http://koinoniacares.org/>.

