



December 2, 2008

'Tis the season of giving

2nd annual *E-G*food drive to benefit families, children in need

By *MICHELLE GEORGE*
The Eagle-Gazette Staff

LANCASTER - The *Lancaster Eagle Gazette* is kicking off its second annual food drive to help Fairfield County families and children in need - but there are a few new twists.

The *Eagle-Gazette*, for the first time, is adding a toy drive for children ages 3 to 12. Residents are asked to match the truckload of nonperishable food items they donated in 2007 and bring a toy.

But the *Eagle-Gazette* is challenging businesses to at least match community's food donations. Residents donated 2,000 pounds of food - one truckload - and \$80 cash during the daylong inaugural food drive.

"The community's response to the drive last year and the increasing number of people needing help were the catalysts for us raising the ante," said Managing Editor Antionette Taylor-Thomas. "Companies are part of this community, too. And we believe it's important they also answer the call for help by getting involved in efforts such as the food and toy drive."

The food and toy drive helps to support the Lancaster-Fairfield County Food Pantry at Community Action and Fairfield County Job & Family Services.

And the drive couldn't have come at a better time for Carol Wagner, emergency service director Community Action.

"Right now, we are experiencing a real shortage with food items and are struggling to meet that need," Wagner said.

New toys and nonperishable goods will be collected between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. Dec. 16 in the *Eagle-Gazette*'s parking lot, 138 W. Chestnut St., Lancaster.

Families are referred to the pantry through Fairfield County JFS, churches or schools and are eligible

for one food order a month, Wagner said.

The pantry issued 6,967 food orders from January to November 2008, Wagner said. The agency issued 6,908 orders for the same period in 2007.

Wagner attributes the increase in food orders to the number of people who are losing their jobs locally. More than 534,000 unemployment claims, including 4,674 from Fairfield County, were filed in October. Ohio's 7.3 percent unemployment rate tied with Oregon for seventh-highest in the country.

"There have been a lot of families who have lost their jobs who have never been in this situation before," Wagner said. "I think from January to the end of November, we had 714 households who have never been here."

The toys will be given to children who are being helped through Child Protective Services at Fairfield County JFS.

Rich Bowlen, director of Child Protective Services, said many of the donations go to children who are living with relatives.

"These families kind of struggle because they don't get a lot of assistance from the state and they are very appreciative," Bowlen said.

Bowlen said there are 70 children with kinship families this holiday and 130 children in foster care or another type of placement setting.

Bowlen said he is appreciative of the donations the agency receives every year at Christmastime.

"(Fairfield County) is a unique county in that there seems to be a caring spirit here," Bowlen said. "They make a choice to prioritize the needs of children, especially this time of year."

Additional Facts

How to Help

- **What:** The Lancaster Eagle-Gazette Second Annual Food and Toy Drive
 - **What to do:** Bring nonperishable food items and new toys between 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. Dec. 16.
 - **Where:** The parking lot of the Lancaster Eagle-Gazette, 138 W. Chestnut St., Lancaster.
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