

## Bank with a simple bailout plan: Feeding the hungry in eastern N.C.

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The Daily Reflector

Monday, January 05, 2009

With the end of the holiday season, food bank workers want to remind the community that people are at risk of hunger all year long.

Christy Simmons, public relations manager with the Food Bank of Central and Eastern North Carolina, said the holiday season was a success due to the support of the community, but the food bank needs support all year.

"Our agencies, like food pantries and rescue missions, are seeing anywhere from a 30 percent increase or more of people showing up at their doors," Simmons said.

"Due to the economy, a lot of them are new faces."

Simmons said the food bank tends to get about 50 percent of its food drive contributions during the holidays.

"When January rolls around we still have people that don't have enough food to eat," she said.

"Some people are having to make the decision on whether or not to pay for heat or put food on the table. So, we need the support of the community throughout the year."

With the purchasing power of the food bank, one dollar can be used to provide four meals, Simmons said.

The food bank recently got substantial donations from SuddenLink and Dominion North Carolina Power.

"We are able to take that money and really stretch it to provide meals to those at risk in the Greenville service area," Simmons said.

But the food bank also relies heavily on the donations of individuals in the form of food, money and time, she said.

"Even when the economy is what we term good, there are still people who are hungry and there are still people who are at risk for hunger," Simmons said.

"When you have a dramatic downturn in the economy, there is a direct correlation in what we see. It tends to put a greater responsibility on food banks and that is where the support of the community comes in."

The Greenville branch, located at 497 W. Ninth Street, is a 22,000-square foot warehouse that distributed more than 6.5 million pounds of food to a network of nearly 150 partner agencies including food pantries, shelters, soup kitchens and group homes in 2007-08.

The Greenville location serves 10 of the 34 counties served by the Food Bank of Central and Eastern North Carolina: Carteret, Craven, Edgecombe, Greene, Jones, Lenoir, Onslow, Pamlico, Pitt and Wilson counties.

According to the U.S. Census, there are more than 111,000 people at risk of hunger in the 10 counties served by the Greenville branch.

More than 10,000 of those are over the age of 65, and 40,000 are children.

For every dollar donated to the Food Bank of Central and Eastern North Carolina, the agency can distribute \$8 in food or provide four meals.

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