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## Pilot outreach program puts focus on food resources for local seniors

By Tom Marine  
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To ensure seniors have access to essential food resources, the Food Bank of Central & Eastern North Carolina launched a pilot outreach program Wednesday in Pitt County.

The Food and Nutrition Services Program Outreach Project, formerly known as the Food Stamp Program, is designed to raise awareness and educate potential participants about the benefits of the program.

If successful, the one-year pilot could become the standard for other counties in eastern North Carolina, officials from the food bank said.

Outreach Coordinator Brad Blackwell said the program, funded through a grant from the Cisco Systems Foundation, will focus on senior citizens who need help sustaining a source of income for food. By providing these funds, he said, families will be able to reallocate money coming into the household to cover other expenses.

Blackwell said about 6 percent of the senior population in Pitt County lives at or below the poverty line, making them potentially eligible for the program.

"There is a great need, particularly with the state of the economy," he said. "We want to make sure people have the right information."

To help along the way, Blackwell said the food bank selected two agencies to connect seniors who rely on these emergency assistance services with the program — Philippi Church of Christ and The Anointed Ones Church.

He said the churches serve an important role by dispelling myths the community may have about participating.

Franchine Philpot Neña and Petrina Ewing, representing the two churches, said more than 70 seniors received program information at the launch.

"We want to make sure individuals are fed," Philpot Neña, human services director at Philippi Church of Christ, said. "Hunger has a cure."

Ruth McCullers Lee, manager of community relations at Cisco, said the foundation donated \$20,000 for the project. For 12 years, she said, the foundation and food bank have served as partners in the region.

Blackwell emphasized this program does not qualify people for benefits, and only the Department of Social Services can make that final decision. He said the primary role of the program is to help the social services staff reach the residents most in need.

"Their role is instrumental, for data tracking and relationship building," Blackwell said.

Ewing, church secretary for the Anointed Ones Ministry, said donations have been steady and future food drives should help sustain their mission.

"No one should go hungry," Ewing said.

For more information about the food bank, go to its Web site at [www.greenville.foodbank.cenc.org](http://www.greenville.foodbank.cenc.org).

Contact Tom Marine at [tmarine@coxnc.com](mailto:tmarine@coxnc.com) or (252) 329-9567.

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