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40 million pounds 'in the Bank' and hungry are still being helped

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DURHAM -- Forty million pounds of food.

That's how much the Durham branch of the nonprofit Food Bank of Central & Eastern North Carolina has collected to help hungry people since opening in 1999, and it marked that milestone Tuesday with balloons and cheers, but a reminder donations are still needed.



"It's wonderful, because that's millions of pounds that we have distributed to those at risk of hunger," Christy Simmons, Food Bank public relations manager, said.

They weighed tuna, stroganoff dinner, Special K bliss bars and peanut butter, but still needed 24 pounds to hit the mark. Then, a 26-pound box of Juicy Juice was added, pushing them to 40 million pounds.

The Durham branch serves Durham, Chatham, Granville, Orange, Person and Vance counties.

Some of its partners include the Durham Rescue Mission, soup kitchens and senior meal programs.

Simmons said donations have remained steady during the economic downturn, but the need has increased 30 to 60 percent.

"We've really pushed the message that for \$1, for the change in your car's cup holder, you can feed four people," she said.

In the summer, donations tend to dip, but the need increases, especially among children who are out of school and aren't getting free or reduced-cost meals, she said.

How can people help? There are three ways:

- Giving food at food drives or by dropping it off at the Durham site at 708

Gilbert St.

- Giving money online at www.foodbankcenc.org

- Donating time, by helping sort food at the Durham site and getting it to those who need it.

One of those at Tuesday's celebration was Camille Koonce, program coordinator for AIDS Service-Carolina, who received a certificate and trophy -- a big can of sweet potatoes. The agency, at 1810 E. Main St., provides prevention, education, testing and practical support for those living with HIV and AIDS and their loved ones.

"We are just so blessed to be able to shop there," Koonce said. "It's had such a tremendous impact for us and the community."

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