

Group Brings Businesses, Others Together for Food Pantry Help

The Rotary Club of The Villages Evening collected over 5,500 pounds of food and about \$800 in a drive.

By ANDREA DAVIS
Daily Sun Staff Writer

As many continue to hear the call of communities around The Villages needing a helping hand with food and other items, local groups are stepping up to help.

Recently, The Rotary Club of The Villages Evening partnered with several local businesses including Village Car Wash, Hungry Howie's, Langley Health Services and Bella's Hair Studio to host a food drive Jan. 9.

Using three various drop-off locations, including Everglades Regional Recreation Complex, Paradise Regional Recreation Complex and Village Car Wash, the club collected about \$800 and over 5,500 pounds of food, diapers and female hygiene products to benefit four local food pantries. They also received help from the Mercedes-Benz car club and other contributions made by Villages residents.

The four food pantries are Hope Ministries in Bushnell, Lake Panasoffkee United

Methodist food pantry, Hope Lutheran Church Lake-Weir Campus's food pantry in Summerfield and St. Theresa Catholic Church food pantry and soup kitchen in Belleview, all of which have seen an increased need of clients coming to them for help.

"Paul Quinn and Vicki Wynns, staff of Langley Health Services in Sumterville, brought the Langley Medical Bus to help transport donations to both Hope Ministries in Bushnell and Lake Panasoffkee United Methodist food pantry," said Rotary club President Gay Ratcliff-Seamans, of the Village of Belle Aire. "Rotarian Karl Kerri and I had visited Hope Ministries about a month prior and we were surprised at the need in southern Sumter County."

Quinn said staff at Langley were glad to help out.

"Both of these pantries will be helped with the donations that were taken in at Everglades by both the Rotarians, the Mercedes-Benz car club and the community," he said in a recent news release. "We were thrilled to see the steady stream of cars donating. The community is very generous and lots of high demand items including diapers, feminine hygiene products and laundry detergent were donated in addition to food."



On the northern end of The Villages, cars and golf carts made a steady stream into the car wash location to drop off donations.

"All we could say was 'Wow!' when we saw the van going to St. Theresa's fill up twice," said car wash manager Victor Lopez. "We're glad we can be part of this as the need continues to grow and our community and customers help us in generous ways," added car wash staff member Curtis Love.

Sandra Ricciardi, co-chair of the Rotary Food Drive, said although this is the third time the group has collaborated with Village Car Wash and Hungry Howies, each time gets better.

Along with the steady stream of donations from residents and customers who knew about the drive, Rotarians Cindy and

Marvin Ivy, of the Village of Poinciana, also brought in a truckload of contributions of items and cash from neighbors within their Village.

"Since last March, we have seen the rising need for food assistance," Ratcliff-Seamans said. "We are greatly encouraged by the community recognizing this need and being so

generous. We know the need is there, so we have committed to quarterly food drives and financial support to help ease some of the strain at several local food pantries."

Food donations are being accepted the entire month of January at various locations including Mulberry Grove, Paradise, La Hacienda, Santiago

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1/20/2024

From left: Edna Deleon, of Village Car Wash; Jack Nettis Jr., St. Theresa's Catholic Church food pantry director; Curtis Love, of Village Car Wash; Victor Lopez, of Village Car Wash; Gay Davidson, a Rotarian; Sue Bodenner, a Rotarian; and Gay Ratcliff-Seamens, president of the Rotary Club of The Villages Evening, gather Jan. 9 with a van filled with donations at Village Car Wash.

Submitted photo

and Everglades regional recreation complexes, Savannah Center and Village Car Wash near Spanish Springs. For more information visit rotaryvillagesevening.com.

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