

# Food drive tops last year by a ton

Sunday, December 6, 2009  
The Daily News  
By Cheryll A. Borgaard

Clad in bright red T-shirts and scurrying as busily as Santa's elves, a dozen volunteers from the Cowlitz PUD attacked and sorted through mountains of canned food arriving Saturday at the CAP Help Warehouse.

"This started as a way to do some team-building," said Doug Wood, PUD director of information services, "It's a good way to get involved and give back to the community."



From left, Jeff Dean, Patti Leaf, Lindsay Fowler, Antonio Cervantes, Greg Stone and Karissa Burt pounce on bags of canned goods to sort into boxes Saturday at the Help Warehouse during the annual Walk and Knock food drive. Bill Wagner / The Daily News

The PUD crew was among hundreds of volunteers in Cowlitz County collecting and sorting nonperishable food for the annual Walk and Knock food drive. This year's drive brought in 77,000 pounds of goods — a ton more than last year.

"We expected to see a slump," because of tough economic times, said Alan Rose, Lower Columbia Community Action Program's director of community service. "We are very pleased."

The demand for food for the needy continues, though the clientele is changing, said Lois Shelton, Help Warehouse program manager.

"Years ago, a person would come to the food bank maybe two times until they got back on their feet," she said. "Now, we're seeing people coming back all the time just for survival. And as more families are moving in together, so the amount of food each household needs is going up."

Shelton said people seeking help now often are newly unemployed.

"If you lost your job, you might have savings or a boat you can sell, so you don't need the food bank right away," she said. "People who have worked all their lives, that's who we're seeing now. They have a lot of pride; this is very painful for them."

Though the bulk of items were collected Saturday, Rose said there also were a number of smaller food drives in November that collected 7,700 pounds prior to Walk and Knock.

Some of the more notable ones included Just Music & Movies, which donated 3,720 pounds and First Baptist Church with 1,160 pounds, Rose said. Additional food drives at Olympic Elementary School, the city of Longview Parks & Recreation Department, Americorps volunteers, Weight Watchers, Mark Morris High School and the Montessori School also helped, he said.

Saturday's Walk and Knock collections included \$2,600 cash donations, down by about half from last year, Rose said.

"We're expecting other donations to be mailed in," he said. Last year, a total of \$15,000 was received by mail in the weeks after Walk and Knock.

Walk and Knock is the largest annual community food drive. It's held the first Saturday of December, helping to fill a near-empty Help Warehouse, which distributes food to eight food banks in Cowlitz and Wahkiakum counties.

"I've seen it happen year after year," said Shelton, who has been at Help Warehouse since 1985. "It's such an overwhelming community effort. The generosity always leaves me feeling really emotional."

**If your bag wasn't picked up:** If volunteers missed your house, you can call Help Warehouse Monday at (360) 425-3430, ext. 283, and volunteers will pick it up. You also can drop off food donations at Help Warehouse in the CAP building, 1526 Commerce Ave., Longview, next to the Columbia Theatre.