

SW Hope: Feed the Hungry campaign attempts to raise 100,000 pounds of food

By Allison Rupp
The Southwest Portland Post

Three years ago, Patty Campbell-Schmitt knew there were hungry people in Southwest Portland, and she sought to raise awareness of that fact through the SW Hope: Feed the Hungry campaign. Now more than ever, she says, "people know the need is great."

Which is why Campbell-Schmitt, co-pastor at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in the Hillsdale neighborhood, has high hopes for the third annual campaign, kick-started last Sunday and running until April 5.

SW Hope partners faith communities like St. Andrew's with the Southwest Portland charity Neighborhood House to try to raise 100,000 pounds of food or its cash equivalent (one dollar purchases five pounds of food from the Oregon Food Bank).

Neighborhood House then distributes the donations in the form of emergency food boxes to those in need in the local community. The number of boxes requested has increased dramatically in the past year, says Rick Nitti, executive director of Neighborhood House.

In the past few months, they have been serving 420 households (or around 1,300 individuals) per month, up from about 260 in 2007. On the other hand, the weight of food that one dollar could buy at the Oregon Food Bank has decreased by half, down from ten pounds in 2007, when food prices were much lower.

Campbell-Schmitt believes the need can only be met through a coalition of community organizations working together to

achieve the goal—from religious groups to restaurants, scout troops to athletic teams. In its first year, SW Hope attracted 14 religious communities to take on the brunt of the fundraising; this year 26 groups are involved.

"All of the churches have been affected by the recession in some way," she says, "but all of them returned to the campaign with so much enthusiasm—and even more have come on board."

In addition, over 50 other local organizations are participating this year, including a number of restaurants that have agreed to donate a portion of their proceeds on certain Dine Out and Donate days.

"We want each organization to figure out what's doable for them and contribute in that way," Nitti says.

David Barber, the owner of Three Square Grill in Hillsdale, participates each year as a way of celebrating the restaurant's yearly anniversary. On March 24, from 5:00pm-9:00pm, he'll be donating ten percent of the restaurant's earnings to SW Hope.

Other restaurants will be hosting special fundraising dinners, like Fat City Café's spaghetti dinner on April 3, in which all of the proceeds will go to the campaign. A complete list of local eateries participating in Dine Out and Donate can be found at www.swhope.org.

While the SW Hope campaign raises critical amounts of food for the community, it also raises awareness that hunger is a problem in Southwest Portland, an area often assumed to be one of the more affluent regions in the city. According to Nitti, over 80 percent of the households served by Neighborhood House are in



Rick Nitti, executive director of Neighborhood House, at the Neighborhood House food bank in Multnomah Village. (Post photo by Allison Rupp)

Southwest Portland.

Many of the groups involved will be sending teams of canvassers door to door to spread the word and ask for nonperishable items like canned food between February 15 and March 15.

Individuals are encouraged to bring food to convenient drop boxes located throughout Southwest Portland in places like the Multnomah Center, Food Front

grocery store, and Baker & Spice bakery.

Though Nitti, Campbell-Schmitt, and other organizers say that meeting their numerical goal would be wonderful, they believe the campaign will at least get people involved in an important issue that affects their local community. "This is about fighting hunger right here right now," Nitti says.



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