

HUNGER from page 4

Director Jean DeMaster about the rise in low-income residents in East Portland and Gresham.

DeMaster's organization finds affordable housing for those in need through a mix of facilities it runs and landlords it works with. She says the reason you see the kind of hunger in places like Rockwood is because of

the sheer volume of affordable housing available there.

"Historically there was a large amount of multi-family housing that was not kept in good repair," she says about the region. "So it went down in quality. That made rents go down. So when there was gentrification in northeast Portland, families looked around and said, 'Where is there low rent?'" Many moved to East Portland and Rockwood.

Human Solutions has also moved into the area. Of the organization's 675 apartment units, 350 are in East Portland. The rest are in East Multnomah County, including Gresham and Fairview. A look at how the group's Section 8 housing has been distributed shows a similar pattern. DeMaster says at least 100 Section 8 vouchers it helps distribute are currently in Rockwood, 45 are in Fairview, and another 100 are in East Portland between 82nd and 162nd Ave.

And it's not just Human Solutions. Home Forward, Portland's housing bureau, which also serves Gresham, has also been slowly

moving its Section 8 housing eastward into East Portland and Gresham.

Without blaming any one organization or factor, DeMaster says this influx, and the poor economy, has placed increasing pressure on available services. Providers say it shows. Again hunger is our guide.

The View From SnowCap

"You can see the higher part is where the building will be," says Judy Alley, pointing to a recently poured concrete foundation in front of her.

Alley is the executive director of SnowCap Community Charities, a nonprofit food pantry in Rockwood. The foundation, says Alley, is part of a new expansion that she hopes will help SnowCap serve more people.

Currently, Alley's organization serves about 8,000 low-income Gresham-area people a month. But, Alley says, due to a combination of high demand and a cramped warehouse, the pantry has had to turn away food shipments. The new construction is an attempt to solve that problem.

The foundation and the warehouse it will support will give SnowCap an extra 2,000 square feet of storage. Alley says the need for more space first became apparent five years ago when the economy plummeted and unemployment skyrocketed. As a consequence, demand for SnowCap food also grew.

"2008 was very scary," says Alley. "We started seeing more people. We were serving about 4,000 people a month and that was all we could do. But the people were lining up."

To compensate for the increased demand, Alley says she reached out to find new sources of food and funding. But adding more food quickly filled up the pantry's tiny warehouse. They had to expand.

Along with laying the groundwork for more

space, SnowCap also started a community garden. Today it's a sprawling cornucopia of raised beds filled with zucchini, squash, broccoli, kale, chard, and other sumptuous vegetables tended by about 40 gardeners. Alley says despite efforts like these and talk about the recession being over, she doesn't see hunger in Gresham diminishing.

"The fact is Rockwood has changed the demographic," she says. "This is hardcore systemic poverty happening in a small town. And Gresham is a small town."

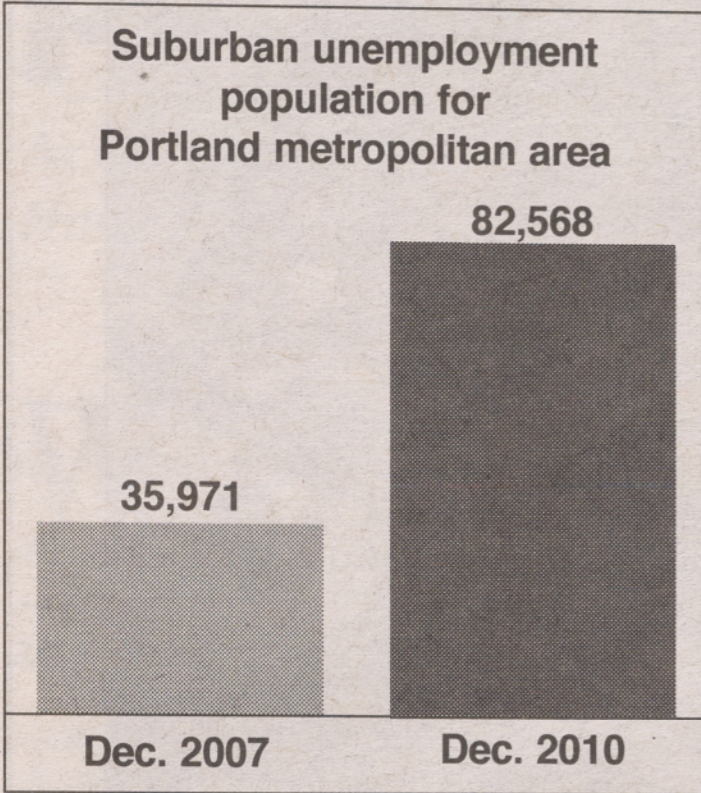
Back to School

Back at Alder, lunchtime is over. Fox is at the front of the gym. Nearly all the 80 kids are sitting attentively, listening to her as she reads off the results of a raffle. At the back of the room, a group of five mothers sit talking at the cafeteria's furthest table. They're Latino immigrants and spoke with Street Roots with help from Jessenia Jimenez, a 22-year-old volunteer fluent in Spanish and English.

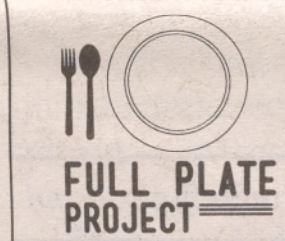
"My apartment is too much of a problem," says one woman, adding that her landlord has yet to fix her leaking roof. These low-income women say they don't have cars and have to endure long bus rides to get groceries. They say violence is huge in Rockwood.

The mother who was reluctant to enter the school is now among them, her child in her arms. She says rape is a big problem in Rockwood. She doesn't feel safe. She says the police aren't helpful.

Another woman, 29-year-old Eva Morales Vasquez, her three kids huddled around her, says, "There are good things about the community too. There are clinics that don't charge a lot. And there are places where you can get (free) food."



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, as compiled by The Brookings Institute



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