

Hungry from 1A

food insecure — more than the population of Eugene.

The issue is only compounded during the summer time. While school programs provide meals to students during the school year, the need for nutritional and filling choices becomes greater as latchkey teens stay at home with empty cupboards.

Starting Monday, Boys and Girls Club will serve free hot meals Monday through Friday to any teen between the ages of 12 and 18. The meals will be served twice a day at noon and 4 p.m.

Every teen is welcome, regardless of their affiliation with the organization.

Boys and Girls Club Interim Director Chuck Trent explained the reasoning behind the move.

“While the general economy across Oregon has improved, and

it has improved somewhat in Florence, the families that are coming in are basically minimum wage with no benefits and part-time work. They can’t afford food,” he said.

What is of particular concern for Trent is those families who just hover above the poverty line. In these instances, they make too much money to qualify for federal and state assistance, but they don’t make enough to cover food costs.

“These are the ones I lose sleep over, the ones hidden in plain sight. Often times the parents don’t know where to ask for help,” Trent said.

The teens, he believes, are in need of the most assistance.

“How many toddlers do you see wandering the street corners during the summer months? The reality is, parents will do whatever they have to do for the younger children but often the teens are

left behind. So that’s what we’re trying to do,” he said.

Trent teamed up with Food Backpack for Kids, the Mapleton School District and Mapleton Food Share to start an ambitious program to provide food for children throughout the Siuslaw region.

“We were at a loss of how to help kids during the summer-time,” said Dale Edwards, director of Food Backpack for Kids.

Backpack, which started in 2012, first began as a supplemental food program during the school year. While the school provided up to three meals a day to students, youth were often going home hungry over the weekend.

The catalyst for the program started when Backpack organizers heard a story of a child who, having no food over a weekend, was forced to go dumpster diving.

Edwards investigated the issue and found that the occurrence was not uncommon or limited to a few individuals.

“Some of these kids were living in tents, they were couch

surfing. It was staggering,” he said.

So a group began raising funds. Soon, their program, made up entirely of volunteers, was able to provide food for students to have over the weekend.

But the problem was what to do once the school year ended.

“Hunger doesn’t take a vacation,” Edwards said. “We know that there are children in need during the summer, but we were at a loss of how to develop a program to feed them.”

Enter Chuck Trent.

Seeing that the need for a summer meal program was rising over the summer, he approached Edwards, along with Karen Harden from Mapleton Food Share and Jodi O’Mara from the Mapleton School District, to bring food to the hardest hit families in the area.

The cost for the summer food program comes from a variety of sources. The Kiwanis Club of Florence gave a sizeable donation, as did Art and Jean Koenig.

Oregon Department of Education Child Nutrition Program will reimburse the food

itself. It sponsors U.S. Department of Agriculture food and nutrition plans to support the growth and development of Oregon’s children.

The requirements for the program can be strict, however. Meal plans are regulated, calling for certain amounts of wheat, vegetables and milk for each meal.

Boys and Girls Club employee Illene Armer, who is in charge of implementing the food program, sees this as a challenge.

“If (kids) don’t like it, they won’t eat. And then they’ll starve,” Armer explained. “An adult realizes food is food, but a teen won’t eat just carrots and celery. So we work hard on making a homemade, complex meal.”

The menu includes chicken alfredo, tacos, homemade mashed potatoes and potato salad. The broccoli is sautéed and the asparagus is roasted.

Preparing the food can be difficult with the facilities they currently have. With just a few hot-plates and a toaster oven, Armer works diligently with volunteers from Food Backpack for Kids to

prepare and cook food at home.

While the program expects to serve an average of 50 teens per serving — they can do more if the need arises — organizers fear they may not be able to reach children in more rural communities. They believe there are at least 100 teens in the surrounding areas that need assistance.

To help alleviate this, Trent partnered with Mapleton. Not only will Food Share and the school district inform parents and youth about the program, but they will bus the teens down to Florence for meals.

Currently, the Mapleton team is only able to bring teens to Florence on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Team members are looking for volunteers to drive the rest of the week.

No special certification is required, just a normal drivers license and a clean driving record.

Ultimately, Trent hopes that the meals will not only help alleviate hunger among the population, but also increase engagement.

“My hope is, when youth come for food they’ll see our programs and the fun they can have,” he said. “When you take a look at poverty, it’s the lowest kids who are in the lowest level that we have the toughest time getting through school and graduating.”

“You get a summer brain drain, and that’s where kids can get into trouble. Here we do math, reading, and science, but we do it through games. They’re learning all summer long and they don’t know that they’re learning. They’re just having a good time.”

For Trent, helping children get a step up is a lifelong passion.

“I’ve been where these kids are. I was one of the lucky ones because I had someone who did what I’m trying to do with these kids. If that didn’t happen, my life would be so much different,” he said. “When the kids are here, we give them hope for the future. And at the end of the day, it equals love.”

For more information or to get involved, contact the Boys and Girls Club of Western Lane County at 541-902-0304.

240
HOURS

Is your family prepared?

If an emergency happens in your community, it may take emergency workers some time to reach you. You should be prepared to take care of yourself and your family for a minimum of 240 hours.

Get your emergency first aid kit started with these essentials:

- First aid manual
- Aspirin or pain relievers
- Laxatives, diarrhea medicine
- Rubbing alcohol, petroleum jelly
- Soap, salt, baking soda
- Sanitary napkins, matches
- Triangular bandages
- Elastic bandages, pressure dressings
- Cotton balls, disposable diapers
- Scissors, needles, tweezers
- Popsicle sticks, splints, heavy string
- Thermometer, paper tape
- Syrup of Ipecac
- Personal prescription medications

This message brought to you by the West Lane Emergency Operations Group. www.wleog.org

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THIS WEEK ON THE COAST

A WEEKLY LISTING OF COMMUNITY EVENTS IN THE FLORENCE AREA

SUBMIT ALL EVENTS INFORMATION VIA EMAIL TO PRESSRELEASES@THEVIOUSLAWNEWS.COM

July 8

“Animals of the Dunes” with Dina Pavlis
1-2 p.m.
Open to public
Siuslaw Public Library

The Siuslaw Jam Music Celebration
2 p.m. — free, “Intro to Jazz for the Young and Young at Heart”
7 p.m. — tickets required, “Jazz and the American Popular Song”
Florence Events Center

2nd Saturday Gallery Tour
3-5 p.m.

Open to public
Various galleries in Florence
2ndSaturdayGalleryTour.com

July 9

Mapleton Lions Pancake Breakfast
7:30-10:30 a.m.
\$7 for adults, \$3 for youth
Mapleton Lions Club
88148 Riverview Drive

July 10

SAPPSA meets
3:30 p.m.
Open to public
Siuslaw Public Library

sapps@oregonfast.net

Siuslaw Soil, Water Conservation District meets
6:30 p.m.
Open to public
1775 Laurel Place, Ste #4, Florence

July 11

KXCR presents Storyteller Chris Chandler
7 p.m.
Tickets required
Class Act Theatre

Us TOO Florence Prostate Cancer Education/Support Group

5-7 p.m.
Open to public
Presbyterian Church of the Siuslaw 541-999-4239

July 13

“Build a Better World” Youth Summer Reading Programs
10:30-11:30 a.m.
Open to youth
Siuslaw Public Library

Siuslaw Friendship Club Annual Picnic
11:30 a.m.
Open to public
Woahink Lake Yurt
541-294-8270

July 14

KXCR presents Amy Sue Berlin and Kindra Kinsey
7 p.m.
Donations welcome
Siuslaw Public Library

July 15

Power of Florence
7 a.m. — Pancake breakfast
9 a.m. — Power Walk
Events all day
Open to public, various locations
PowerofFlorence.org

The Covered Bridges of Oregon

1-2 p.m.
Open to public
Siuslaw Public Library

Van Fans Ice Cream Social
1-4 p.m.
Open to public
Florence Events Center

Sand Master Jam 2017
1-5 p.m.
Registration Required
Sand Master Park

Fanny Rugburn: “Drag Me to Neverland”
8 p.m.
\$10 admission, cash; open to all ages
Class Act Theatre

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