

Food Share from 1A

Now, individuals living at or below 200 percent of the poverty line can sign up for the program.

"It's the 15 percent that sometimes fall through the cracks," Barton said. "They are still the working poor, but they don't qualify to come shop at the pantry."

Instead, the 15 percent has to obtain their food from a separate source, located in the lobby.

"There is less food in the lobby," Barton said. "It has a little bit older produce, plus grains. If we have extra dairy, there is dairy."

Unlike the traditional pantry, individuals who qualify for the lobby area can come in every day.

"What happened when Food for Lane County implemented this new program, word got out that we were serving people that were making a little bit more money, and all of a sudden the lobby was flooded with people."

Barton estimated that an additional 150 to 200 people per day arrived at the food share.

The already cramped lobby area became overwhelmed with new clients who did not know where to go and overcrowded the establishment.

"It was just a crowded, chaotic mess," Barton said.

At the same time, more people were coming in who qualified for the pantry, which also became overburdened.

"If we have so many clients in here that the shelves become bare, we don't have space to restock the shelves when the clients are there," Barton said. "So very often clients are going to get much less of a selection because the cupboards are bare."

It's at this point Florence Food Share realized it needed an expansion, both to give room for lobby clients and

allow food share staff to restock the pantry as clients were getting their own food.

The organization did not dip into the operational fund for the expansion, instead relying on grants and private donations. Eight donors gave a total of \$67,000, and \$83,000 was given through grants. These funds were restricted to the remodel only, and could not be used for operation costs.

Last year, as crowds were coming in, cash donations were plentiful.

"We had a banner year because of donations," Barton said.

But this year, donations of decreased dramatically.

"I don't know whether the cause of that is the perception that we're rolling in cash because of the addition, or maybe there are just more non-profits in town that are asking for money. I don't know. Maybe the community's dollars are spread thinner. I'm just not quite sure what the reason is," she said.

As Florence Food Share has been working with an increase in clients and a decrease in funding, it has also been faced with two more unexpected challenges.

The first will affect this year's Thanksgiving holiday.

In the past, Safeway has provided Thanksgiving meal packages to Florence Food Share that included a turkey, stuffing, mashed potatoes and gravy.

The program, called Turkey Bucks, was funded by cash donations given by Safeway customers to reduce hunger in local communities. The requests were made to customers at checkout stands, requesting amounts for \$1, \$5 and \$10. Once Thanksgiving rolled around, the local Safeway market would take the cash, buy the turkey dinners and give them directly to Florence Food Share.

However, last month FOOD for Lane County was informed that Safeway would be chang-

ing how it works the program. Instead of having local outlets provide the food directly, the donated money will be sent to the Oregon Food Bank, which is located in Portland. The food will be purchased there, then shipped to regional food banks throughout the state, like FOOD for Lane County. At that point, FOOD for Lane County will distribute the food to local food shares.

FOOD for Lane County Resource Developer Brad Bassi stated the organization is "committed to getting each community outside of Eugene and Springfield its share of the donated product in as timely manner as possible."

However, Lane County won't begin receiving food shipments from the Oregon Food Bank until between Nov. 20 and the middle of December, most likely missing the Thanksgiving holiday entirely.

In response to the change, Safeway Communications and Public Affairs Director Jill McGinnis said, "We want to ensure that all food we provide, both in-store and out of store, is handled and distributed in a standard and food safe manner. That is why we have shifted to the distribution process that we have. This ensures that the cold chain stays intact and that no one is put at risk. Thankfully, this has allowed us to continue to provide meals to Florence Food Share and many other food pantries in small communities."

Regarding the delay in delivery, McGinnis said, "The meal vendor, Safeway and the Oregon Food Bank are working diligently to ensure the best possible outcome for the recipients this holiday season."

The decision to redirect the food was a corporate decision.

The local Safeway store has worked diligently to support food share, Barton pointed out.

This past Wednesday, Shorewood Senior Living began a 20-day food drive for the food share to help offset

some of the shortages they're facing. The local Safeway donated \$600 worth of coupons as an incentive for customers to donate food.

"To be clear, we are going to be receiving a comparable amount of product from Food for Lane County from the local money Safeway is providing, but we are not receiving turkey dinners like we usually do," Barton said. "I just want to make it really clear that the local Safeway had no say in this decision. I am very grateful for all of the support Safeway has always done for us."

Despite the uncertainty, Barton is still working on raising funds for Thanksgiving dinner.

"Since I've found out about this, I've been putting the word out to various organizations, and I have since raised \$4,000 so far," Barton said.

So far, Florence Food Share has received pledges of \$2,000 from Banner Bank, \$1,000 from PeaceHealth Peace Harbor and \$500 from Oregon Pacific Bank.

A Food share volunteer also donated \$500 of their own money.

"This will purchase approximately 280 turkeys," Barton said. "We are still looking for approximately 120 more in order to serve all of the families that will be wanting one."

However, this year Florence Food Share cannot afford to buy entire meals, just the turkeys.

In the past, the food share has received turkeys from Cindy Wobbe's Annual Food Share Pounding at Grocery Outlet, which last year brought in approximately 11,000 pounds of food.

But Barton said that fundraiser primarily fills the shelves after Thanksgiving, to ensure clients have food for the rest of the holiday season. The majority of those donations are non-perishable items.

There are other Thanksgiving dinners in the Siuslaw region, including Florence Kiwanis' Free Community Thanksgiving Dinner on Thanksgiving Day. While that dinner serves hundreds of residents, regardless of need, it is a community dinner.

Florence Food Share's Thanksgiving program allows families to cook meals in their home for a more intimate holiday.

Along with trying to find ways to provide Thanksgiving dinner, Florence Food Share received another setback via a reduction in donations from Three Rivers Casino Resort.

Originally, the casino offered a year-round program that would help fill the food share's pantry. Twice a week, Three Rivers Players Club members could bring in 3 cans of food and receive a free bingo card.

But since the change in management in August, the promotion has been cancelled, decreasing the amount of food donated.

In the 2016 calendar year, food share received 15,893 pounds of food from Three Rivers, while this year only 11,767 pounds have been donated, producing a 4,126-pound deficit.

However, the 2016 total was for the entire year, and that deficit may be made up with Three Rivers' Toy and Food Drive that runs Nov. 1 to Dec. 14.

That program, the 14th annu-

al Toy and Food Drive, allows Players Club members to trade three cans of food for \$5 in free play at the casino, potentially broadening the scope of donations from bingo players to all players within the casino.

However, donations can only be made once per week, compared to the twice per week of the previous bingo promotion.

Three Rivers' drive only lasts for 44 days, not year-round like the bingo promotion, and food share could stand to lose up to 16,000 pounds of food in 2018 if another program is not instituted.

Three Rivers is working on creating a more permanent solution for Florence Food Share in the long term.

Three Rivers Casino Resort Director of Consumer Marketing Richard Colton stated that since the management changeover, Three Rivers has been working to revamp donation programs.

"We just started a charities committee team, which takes on all of these sorts of things," Colton said. "We've never had that before. We just created it this week and had our first meeting. It had about 10 team leaders from various departments, including myself."

While a decision hasn't been made on food share yet, Colton will be working on the issue soon.

"I don't think they can wait another month," Colton said. "I know it's that time of year that they really need the help."

"This is an expected hit we're going to be incurring next year, so we're trying to put our heads together," Barton said. "We are in the planning

See **FOOD SHARE** 9A

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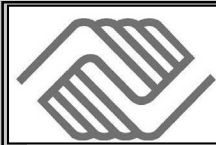
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Florence Food Share provides food to those who are hungry in our community. If you have four hours a week available, we are in need of volunteers to staff our Front Desk and also act as Guides as clients walk through the pantry. Please call our volunteer coordinator, Ivy Medow, @ 541-997-9110 (Monday - Friday, before noon) to learn more about volunteering. info@florence-foodshare.org 2190 Spruce Street.



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