



DAMIEN SHERWOOD/COTTAGE GROVE SENTINEL

A volunteer wheels a holiday meal out to an awaiting recipient in front of Trinity Lutheran Church on Dec. 20.

Joy from A1

In all, 228 food boxes were distributed, 31 of which were made for the LatinX community. LatinX is a gender-neutral alternative term for people of Latin American origin or descent.

The inclusion of Latin food ingredients came six years ago when members of the community found themselves at a loss with certain ingredients.

"We had some of our LatinX families say, 'Gosh,

what do I do with a turkey?' to our LatinX family advocate," said Fleck. "So we started this just as a holiday program, but now we do this all year round."

Regular food boxes included cranberry, green beans, corn, bread rolls, margarine, potatoes, onion, celery, stuffing, broth, condensed milk, cake mix and a protein choice of either chicken or turkey.

In the LatinX box, the program provides masa, corn tortillas, beans, rice, margarine, potatoes, onion, celery, oil, green beans, corn, condensed milk and

sugar. The program uses county funds, donations and fundraisers to provide the wide array of food.

Fleck estimated that Grocery Outlet donated about a quarter of this year's food products, which included 128 turkeys, 153 chickens, 100 pounds of butter, 300 pounds of potatoes, 150 pounds of yellow onions and 179 packages of dinner rolls.

Several dozen volunteers were involved in the program's operation including high school and college students and members

of Community Sharing, Trinity Lutheran Church, Bohemia Sunrises Kiwanis and the Rotary Club of Cottage Grove.

The Tree of Joy program, which provides gifts for school-age children, stood Christmas trees in Walmart and Bi-Mart, decorated with tags of children's present wishes which community members could pick and fulfill. Passers-by picked both trees clean and, on Friday, 240 children's wishes were answered as presents were distributed to awaiting cars alongside the food boxes.

"They really fill a huge, huge area for us in providing the toys and presents to the kids," said Fleck. Community Sharing has been operating the Holiday Food Box since at least the 1990s as far as members can remember and will re-

turn next holiday season. "It's a lot of work and it's a really long day, but it's so worthwhile," said Fleck. "The benefit to the folks in the community is just wonderful. We're thrilled to be able to provide it."

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