

LATEST HEADLINES

UDJ Holiday Fund Drive for Ukiah Community Food Bank begins

As in past years, the goal is once again \$85,000



Many local businesses, groups and community organizations support the Ukiah Community Food Bank. Shown here are: Kip Webb, Chloey Anderson, Kaelyn Hester, and Keori Webb from Girl Scout Troop 1024. (Contributed photos)

By **GRACE WOELBING** | for the Ukiah Daily Journal

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The Ukiah Community Food Bank has been meeting the immediate needs of families and individuals for many years, and since 2011 has operated under the umbrella of the Ford Street Project. Over the past year-and-a-half, the food bank has been a place of hope and security for the community in this particular time of need.

The annual Ukiah Daily Journal Holiday Fund Drive is dedicated to providing the food bank with enough funds to cover their year-round operational costs—the goal is \$85,000.

“What the drive goes to, is literally keeping us open all year,” says Drew Iacomini-Hair, the Community Support and Housing Programs Director for the Ford Street Project. Iacomini-Hair has directed food bank operations for the past seven years.

To run the food bank at its normal capacity, monthly costs are approximately \$15,000 and the annual expense totals about \$180,000.

The Ford Street Project has lost money on the food bank for years and simply supplemented the costs through their other programs, such as the Ukiah Recovery Center and Unity Village housing program.

The money raised during the Holiday Fund Drive goes directly to purchasing food, staff salaries and all other various costs.

Over the last year, the food bank has been grateful to receive an influx of unsolicited donations from the community.

Although the pandemic’s lingering effects on the economy have worsened the financial struggles that many people already experience, it has also increased generosity in others.

“It was such a great feeling, the outpouring of people’s support,” Iacomini-Hair says. “The community knows we needed to stay open.”

Even during the height of the pandemic, there were still funding streams from the community that helped cover COVID-19 related costs—such as installing a hand-washing sink and purchasing personal protective equipment. The food bank also supplied meals to over 170 families in quarantine.

The number of people served by the food bank has dropped to a normal level of distribution this year. This October, the Ukiah Food Bank was responsible for



Additionally, food bank staff and volunteers prepared and delivered 333 holiday baskets to people in need in the community, including the disabled and homebound.

With an unforeseen turkey shortage, staff at the food bank have had to track down the traditional Thanksgiving main course at stores in the area for the past two weeks. Families or individuals who opted for ham or a vegetarian option in their basket were more in luck.

Those receiving a holiday basket can also decide if they want pre-packaged or fresh vegetables, the first of which Iacomini-Hair says is often a preference for the senior citizens served by the food bank.

The fresh vegetables included in the baskets, and also the produce offered at the food bank on a daily basis, are mainly sourced from the Redwood Empire Food Bank in Santa Rosa.

“We get fresh produce from them, cents on a pound,” Iacomini-Hair says, adding that the contract between the two food banks began three years ago.

The remainder of food offered during daily operations is collected locally—as personal as donations from someone’s vegetable garden and also extending to businesses like Raley’s, Starbucks and Costco.

The donations are weighed as they come into the food bank and are documented throughout the year. In 2020, the poundage brought in by the food bank was equivalent to 520,000 meals.

It is a community effort to keep the food bank doors open to the people of Mendocino County, from the monthly financial donations given by community members to the established partnerships with farmers and other pantries in the area.

There are 16 volunteers who consistently lend a hand at the food bank and help pick up, distribute and serve food, along with two full-time and one part-time staff members.

Vince Burtain has been volunteering at the food bank two to three times a week for the past year. He usually works with the bread and produce, but his area of expertise is putting a smile on people’s faces when they walk in.



Burtain originally became involved with the food bank following retirement and after discovering his need to keep busy. He quickly grew to love the personal touch of having conversation and making connections with the people who depend on the food bank.

"I see these people and they're so thankful for this food in the community," Burtain says.

He encourages anyone interested to reach out to the food bank about volunteering and be a part of helping out the community.

"There's a shift that everyone is coming together to try to fix the food policies in Mendocino County and try to end hunger all around the county," Iacomini-Hair says. "Just giving back is important for anybody."

To donate

To participate in this year's fund drive, make out a check to Ford Street Project, in support of the UDJ Food Bank Drive, and mail it to 139 Ford St., Ukiah, CA 95482. Donations can also be made online at www.Fordstreet.org or delivered to the Community Food Bank, 888 N. State St., Ukiah, CA 95482.

To acknowledge the generosity of our community, all donations to the fund drive will be listed in The Ukiah Daily Journal, unless donors request anonymity.





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