

Cooperation key to feeding the hungry

CCH, United Way, others teaming up for massive food giveaway event at PNW

STAFF REPORTS

WESTVILLE — During the COVID-19 pandemic, many organizations stepped up to meet the basic needs of the community, including food, shelter and healthcare.

During 2020, there was also a flurry of activity from organizations working together to reduce food insecurity – families struggling to keep food on the table. That has continued into 2021.



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One such effort will be the largest mobile food giveaway so far, planned for Tuesday morning, March 2, on the Purdue University Northwest Campus in Westville.

Early on, Citizens Concerned for the Homeless was conducting food rescue for Feeding America, taking leftover food from stores and restaurants that would have been thrown away and making it available to those in need, according to Jim Musial, executive director.

In 2019, CCH rescued and distributed more than 144,000 pounds of food, he said. When the pandemic hit, CCH expanded food rescue to food networking to get as



Photos provided / Citizens Concerned for the Homeless

Through its partnership with the Food Bank of Northern Indiana and the United Way of La Porte County, Citizens Concerned for the Homeless gave away more than 1 million pounds of food in 2020 through mobile giveaways, like this one at Marquette Mall.

much food to La Porte County as possible.

In 2020, CCH began working with the USDA Farmers to Family program, Hoosiers Feeding the Hungry and other groups. “More importantly, Food Bank of Northern Indiana increased mobile food distributions in La Porte County from a handful per year to weekly,” Musial said.

And when United Way of La Porte County was invited to participate financially to keep the distributions going, it secured funding to add additional food distribution events across the county, he said.



From left, Jim Musial, executive director of CCH; Dave Sisk, United Way director of corporate engagement; and Oscar Gibson, warehouse manager for the Food Bank, stand outside the CCH food rescue truck.

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“United Way of La Porte County is committed to serving the individuals and families who are struggling during these tough times,” said Kris Pate, executive director. “This partnership is an example of how people and organizations are coming together to help one another.”

To date, nine additional United Way-sponsored events have been conducted in Michigan City, La Porte, Kingsford Heights, New Carlisle/Rolling Prairie and Wanatah.

These resulted in the distribution of more than 1 million pounds of food through a 33-organization network of food pantries, soup kitchens and shelters across the county, Musial said.

More recently, CCH reached out to Purdue Northwest to use their facilities to host an event, and to collaborate with students and faculty of the Social Work Program from the Department of Behavioral Services to work with CCH at events, Musial said.

“The partnership will allow



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the students to see first-hand the face of need, the impact of service and the gratitude of families requiring this assistance. It also shows the power of collaborations by making good services better ones.”

Robin Miller, clinical assistant professor and Field Education director for PNW, called it “an opportunity for our Social Work Students to take what they have learned in classes about the importance of advocacy, volunteerism, social justice and civic engagement to the community in a tangible way.

“We are proud to be part of an institution that is committed to engagement to the community. We are also grateful for community partners who are open to including our students in projects that make a difference in the lives of those we strive to serve,” Miller said.



Photo provided / Citizens Concerned for the Homeless

Volunteers from numerous community organizations help with the food distribution events, the largest of which will take place Tuesday at the Purdue University Northwest campus in Westville.

At the event on Tuesday at the Dworkin Center on the Westville campus, United Way, Food Bank of Northern Indiana, Farmers to Families, CCH and PNW will conduct

the largest event yet – nearly 26,000 pounds of food. United Way is contributing boxes of non-perishable items, while the Farmer to Family boxes provided by the

Food Bank contain a mix of dairy, fresh produce and meat – enough for up to 540 families in need of food assistance. Distribution will be from 10-noon or until supplies run

out. It is a mobile giveaway so visitors are to remain in their vehicles and pop their trunks to receive items. An area will be set up for those without working trunks.