

Kids launch bank bailout

Tiogue School students gather emergency donations for Food Bank



Daily Times/Jessica Selby

Above, fifth grade students at Coventry's Tiogue School formed a food drive committee to collect donations for the Coventry Food Bank. The students included Madison Kelly, Nicole Breindel, Brooke Keresztessy, Megan Quinlan, Destiny Arnold, Miranda Kirkland, Bree-Anna Pike, Nate Vigeant, Zackary Asselin and Nicholas Hart. Below, the food drive bounty is loaded into a van for transport to the food bank.



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COVENTRY — Word spread from the Coventry Food Bank to the halls of Tiogue Elementary School of the need for food and students were quick to respond.

In one week's time, Tiogue School students and their families as well as faculty and staff at the school amassed three loads of food to be donated to the Coventry Food Bank.

According to Stephanie Dugas, the Coventry Food Bank coordinator, the food couldn't have come at a better time. Just a few weeks ago, she said, the shelves at the Coventry Food Bank were so bare the food bank had to close its doors.

"One day, we had to send all of our volunteers home because there wasn't anything for them to stock and, then, on the next day, we had to close because there was no food left for people to pick," Dugas said. "What I think happens sometimes near the end of the summer is that folks forget about donating and I think that was what happened in that case because, on that day, we had to close because we just didn't have anything to give them."

Today, the food bank's status has improved, in part because of the donation from Tiogue School, Dugas said.

Shirley Hall, the school nurse at Tiogue who spearheaded the Tiogue School Harvest Food Drive, said she was incredibly impressed by the number of items the students were able to collect in such a short amount of time.

She sent a letter home with students on Oct. 3, she said, as well as circulating one among teachers, staff and other faculty about the intentions of the food drive, and then asked fifth-grade teachers to nominate some of their students to help her run the food drive, which was scheduled to run from the 6th through the 10th. This group of students would serve as the food drive committee, Hall said.

The group included 10 students — Madison Kelly, Nicole Breindel, Brooke Keresztzessy, Megan Quinlan, Destiny Arnold, Miranda Kirkland, Bree-Anna Pike, Nate Vigeant, Zackary Asselin and Nicholas Hart.

These students voluntarily gave up their recess times to go from classroom to classroom each day during the Harvest Food Drive last week to collect all the food items teachers had stored outside their doors, Hall said. The students on the com-

mittee were charged with the responsibility of counting and recording all of the items that were donated for the school-wide collection contest.

Working with Denise Richtarik, the school principal, Hall said, she established a series of cost free prizes for the students and classrooms that collected the most items. The classroom that collected the most items was guaranteed an extra afternoon recess and the students who donated were each given raffle tickets for a daily drawing. The drawings were each for various prizes including lunch with Richtarik, a nature walk with Hall or an

extra gym class with Mrs. Del-Santo, the school's gym teacher.

Once committee members recorded all of the item information, they transported all the food to one of the front classrooms of the school for storage. By the end of the week, Hall said the 372 students from the school who participated had collected just over 1,000 various non-perishable items for the Coventry Food Bank. It was almost impossible to walk in that front classroom, she said.

A representative from the Coventry Food Bank visited the school on Wednesday to

pick up the food items and transport everything to the food bank.

Dugas said she still hadn't had the opportunity to look through the items donated by the students at Tiogue School, but, whatever it included, she knew it would help.

"Our shelves are usually pretty full, but there is definitely a need right now for more and more items," she said. "We are getting into that time of year where people have to make the choice of paying for heat or buying food. It is not an easy time and we are seeing more and more people accessing the food bank."