

Feeding the hungry has its own rewards

BY JENNIFER BAUMAN
for the Food Bank of Lincoln

We are living in interesting times. The economy is as bad as any time since the Great Depression and no one knows how far it will tumble. In the middle of this mess, we've just witnessed a historic presidential election bringing the promise of change and a call to service.

With so many people struggling, there's much to do, starting with increasing awareness about hunger and poverty. We need to spread the word that one in eight Americans does not know where their next meal is coming from these days. And then we need to pull together to gather food for these households.

There is already an active network of agencies across town working in cooperation with the Food Bank of Lincoln to feed hungry people. These emergency pantries, soup kitchens, and shelters are staffed by people who were moved by a spirit of service long before billion-dollar bailouts and bankruptcies invaded the news.

I have the good fortune of in-

teracting with these kind people on a daily basis and they inspire me with how much they accomplish in the face of increasing challenges. Here are a few sketches from agencies I work with at the Food Bank.

- Ken Stading coordinates Eastridge Presbyterian Pantry, which collects food from several congregations around town. Most of what Eastridge gathers goes directly to Good Neighbor Community Center, where it helps stock the shelves of a busy client-choice pantry. But Ken also fills pastoral referrals where there's a relatively new challenge: packing food boxes for families living in their cars. These folks have nowhere to store or prepare food, so they need items that don't require heating or mixing, packages that open easily and are manageable sitting together all bundled up. It's a hard thing to contemplate.

- Patti Flynn, who has managed Lincoln Lutheran Metro Parish for nine years, goes to the small house where her pantry is located many evenings after she

FOOD FOR THOUGHT



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leaves her day job at the Food Bank. Patti's sister and father are among the church volunteers who pack boxes every week for the People's City Mission, Friendship Home, and Good Neighbor Center, as well as referrals from Lutheran pastors all over Lincoln. With requests for food increasing and the economy putting a pinch on regular donors, the Lutheran pantry struggles to keep food on their shelves. But when things get empty, Patti issues a call for food via local church bulletins and food starts to arrive at the little house. It's a day-to-day race.

- Terry Bowers has coordinated the Southeast Community

Pantry since 2003, all the while juggling his pantry activities with full-time employment. One recent day he went to the pantry early in the morning before his day job to pack boxes for three households. Later that day Sherry Kolder and her mother delivered these food boxes to homes around town. These two slight women lugged approximately 75 pounds of groceries per family in and out of trunks and up and down steps to get food to people. They repeat this pattern in all kinds of weather regardless of their own aches and pains.

- Julie Shaffer manages an emergency pantry at the President & Ambassador apartments near the state Capitol. The Lincoln Interfaith Housing Coalition opened the pantry to serve the needs of the buildings' tenants—low-income people with a variety of challenges. Many are mental-

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∞ Jennifer Bauman

ly or physically disabled, elderly, or ill. They are brain trauma victims, disabled veterans, immigrants. When tenants' food stamps run out, as so often happens these days, the pantry can help with emergency provisions and it often makes the difference between eating and going to bed hungry for these folks.

You can add your name to this list of local heroes. Your help is needed now more than ever before and there are lots of ways to get involved. Volunteer. Donate food or money. Hold a food drive. Just join in.

Your neighbors need you. Almost certainly you will find it rewarding.

Jennifer Bauman works for the Food Bank of Lincoln.