

Spotlight on Crestwood The Youth Provide a Mountain of Christmas Dinners

Oh my! Where to start? How to explain the confusion, the excitement, the constant movement, and the impressive organization of the Crestwood Youth Groups' amazing Christmas food project. I guess I have to start at the beginning, but this was so much more than a step-by-step procedure.



Crestwood has long been a partner with The Nest: A Center for Women, Children, and Families, providing needed items and funds for their programs throughout the year. We really gear up at Christmas. This is the seventh year we have helped with food boxes – each year our giving and participation leap-frogs over the previous one.

Perhaps we should begin our story with Steph Wallace, Crestwood's Student Associate Minister. The entire food project was a dance of coordination, and Steph is the choreographer extraordinaire.

The first step of the ambitious project was fund-raising. The youth needed \$8,000 to purchase the food, but ended up with \$10,000, which enabled them to also help fund the Glendover food project and have some left for our own Blessing Box. There were a number of strong church and community sponsors behind the efforts. Brett Setzer Construction (Brett is a former Crestwood member) and Southland Veterinary Clinic both donated significant amounts. The volunteer help and contributions from "Two Men and a Truck" was invaluable.

"People in this Congregation are so generous and good," Steph Wallace cheered. "We blew by the goal."

After raising the needed funds, the huge food order was placed with Aldi's, who jumped in with enthusiasm to give us the best deal possible. The manager threw in a \$200 gift certificate to buy even more. It took the church van and three pick-up trucks two trips to Aldi's to get all the food. Hats off to all the adult helpers.

About the same time, "Two Men and a Truck" contributed and delivered 500 new boxes to be folded, constructed, and taped by the youngsters. Early in December, the kids turned the job into a contest to see which pairs could put together the most boxes. The winners got \$20 gift certificates, but Steph overheard a heart-warming conversation as they were working as fast as they could. "This isn't really a contest – It's about helping people," one of the wise youngsters said.

The empty boxes nearly filled the Chi Rho room as the big day approached.

In the meantime, the truckloads of food arrived at church. It had to be unloaded and sorted into stations located in a circle around the CYF Room. There were stations for spaghetti sauce, pasta, stuffing, baking mixes, cans of fruit, bags of beans, boxes of mac and cheese, broth, vegetables, and brownie mix. You really can't imagine how much food there was.

On the evening of December 10, about thirty-five young people gathered to load the boxes. In some cases, the teenagers were accompanied by their parents and younger siblings, all of whom took an active role in working to make the holiday happy for someone else.

When I arrived in the Mission Center, the process was already full steam ahead. I had to keep dodging to get out of the way. Some youngsters were assigned places at the food stations. Others served as the pack horses. Each of the moving youngsters grabbed a box from the Chi Rho room, walked rapidly in a flowing line through the connecting doors into the food room. At each station other teens quickly dropped the designated food into the box, and the box carrier continued rapidly around the room to each station. In only a few minutes they exited into the hall where fathers and mothers, and our own Rev. Kory Wilcoxson, sealed each box. Heavy dollies were loaded and wheeled by the men down the hall to the art room where the stacks of filled boxes began to expand. The rapid circling never stopped. The workers were not to be distracted.

“This is like swim practice all over again,” one boy declared as he was filling the always approaching boxes. Why? I asked. “Because we keep moving our arms back and forth, back and forth, never stopping. It’s like swimming. We are going to be sore in the morning!”

I can’t describe the constant circular movement, the fact no one stopped to rest, the physicality of the task. At one point Steph yelled, “Time out. Take a 5-minute break and get water.” Seemed like a good idea to me—it was exhausting to watch—but they just kept moving. Around the circle, into the hall, into the next doorway, grab a box and start again. There was no misbehavior, no horseplay – only hard, cheerful work and lots of laughter.

For an hour the youth swarmed, moved in intricate patterns, and efficiently loaded 400 boxes with food for struggling families served by the Nest. That’s all it took to fill all the boxes.

After a while the food room became strangled with leftover cardboard trays and empty boxes that had held the food. Piles and piles of cardboard were quickly carted into the Chi Rho room after Steph reported that the recycling bin outside was stuffed to the brim. All the remaining cardboard will eventually be broken down and carted away to recycling. The extra boxes donated from Two Men and a Truck are being donated to other food projects in the city.

And then suddenly they were done. The empty boxes, now filled, were taped and stacked in impressive hills in the art room. The young people and their tired parents settled down for a pizza feast. Their task was well done.

And then, a few days later, “Two Men and a Truck” pulled up again to the Mission Center, loaded the filled boxes onto their truck and delivered them to The Nest at no charge.

Hats off to everyone - from the Youth, to their parents and siblings, to our staff, all who went far and above anything I expected to see. I’ve got to say, just watching the young people achieve so very much certainly got me into the Christmas spirit and gave me great hope for Crestwood’s future.

.....

If there is some area of the church you would like to know more about, please share your ideas with me. Let’s explore together.

Gaye Holman: gdholman@bellsouth.net.





Try email marketing for free today!