

# 'Cram the Cruiser' food drive stocks food pantry for busy holiday season;

## *Schools, organizations instrumental in effort*

The cupboards were getting bare at Christ's Hands in Harlan last week. Then, a caravan of Kentucky State Police cruisers, pickup trucks and trailers began backing up to the loading dock and dropping off donations of non-perishable food items collected across the county through the "Cram the Cruiser" food drive.

Bryan Toll, director, of the local food pantry, said the holiday season is a busy time at Christ's Hands and noted demand on available resources increases significantly during the holiday season.

"The need for donations is always here," he said, adding Christ's Hands is distributing about 165 boxes each month.

The burden of fulfilling assistance requests was eased considerably with the KSP food drive resulting in thousands of pounds of non-perishable food being delivered to the center.

"This is the largest single donation we receive each year," said Toll. "Almost 4,000 pounds were donated through Cram the Cruiser to Christ's Hands this year. That is a lot of food.

Toll admits he was surprised to receive the substantial donation this year as a result of difficult economic conditions in the community.

"I am so thankful. It is a blessing," he said.

Toll said the food collected will help requests for two to three months.

Kentucky State Police Public Information Officer Shane Jacobs said he is pleased with the success of the Cram the Cruiser in Harlan County and across the Post 10 coverage area.

Jacobs said areas schools and organizations are instrumental in the project each year.

Green Hill Elementary School Principal Jonathan Perkins said his students participated in the drive again this year.



"Our students graciously donated food items to help those who may not have enough to eat," said Perkins. "Our students learn a great deal academically, but there is more to life than school work. It is through participation in the 'Cram the Cruiser' food drive, and other service learning opportunities, that they learn some of life's greatest lessons. The ability to

reach out to those in need, and to be part of something greater than themselves offers invaluable lessons that help build the character of our students. They did an awesome job!”

Lawrence Powell, director of the Evarts Elementary School Family Resource Center, said he was pleased with the participation from his school as well.

“An opportunity like ‘Cram the Cruiser’ gives our students a chance to be aware of what is going on in their community and what the communities’ needs are,” said Powell. “It also provides an opportunity for students to gain real-life knowledge and get to know more about themselves, which is something that you simply cannot learn from a book. We sincerely thank the Kentucky State Police for giving this opportunity to our students here at Evarts Elementary.”

Terri Kelly, one of the faculty sponsors of the First Priority Club at Rosspoint Elementary School, helped organize the food drive at her school.

“We are thrilled with the participation by our students in the Cram the Cruiser program,” she said. “Our First Priority Club sponsors the program at our school each year. Our students look forward to it and often begin asking early in the year if it is time to start collecting cans.”

“I see how important such a project is to the community. We use it not only for a community service project, but also as a community lesson for our students. We are always very proud of our Rosspoint students and their parents. They are always are very giving for projects like this.”

Madison Cornett, who assisted with the Rosspoint collection, said there is another important aspect of the project.

“Our students look forward to the interaction with the Kentucky State Police troopers and staff who come and pick up the food,” said Cornett. “This alone is another great reason to participate. It helps teach students not to be afraid of the police, that they are caring individuals serving our community.”

Schools look for a variety of ways to encourage student participation, such as awarding a pizza party to a winning homeroom for bringing in the most to encouraging a canned food item donation for a concert admission.

Cawood Elementary School established a goal for 1,000 cans. Principal Melinda Sergent said, “We were able to exceed our goal. We are so proud of our students, parents, and staff for working together for this wonderful cause.”

Christ’s Hands accepts donations between 8 a.m. and 2 p.m. These include monetary, food and used appliances.

For more information call Christ’s Hands at 573-6030.