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Food drive to aid area senior residents

By Carl Orth

Senior citizens shouldn't have to lead lives of quiet desperation, local benefactors believe.

But the recession has only intensified money woes of many low-income Pasco County retirees, said Martha O'Brien, assistant chief executive officer of the Volunteer Way food bank.

The food bank's Brown Bag Program already stocks the pantries for some 110 homebound and disabled seniors.

Now, Home Helpers of Pasco/Pinellas has launched a food drive to help expand the Brown Bag initiative, according to its president, Debbie Humphrey.

Opened in 2008, the local franchise offers home companion services for in-home senior care.

Home Helpers will sponsor the food drive for nonperishable goods through Oct. 15.

Drop-off sites for contributions through the end of September include Prudential Tropical Realty, Minuteman Press, SPCA Suncoast, Style Makers Salon, West Pasco Business Association and Doggy Styles Dog Groomers.

The Brown Bag beneficiaries receive 60 to 80 pounds of food, personal items and "Animeals" for pets the third week of every month, O'Brien said. It's the only food some seniors get all month.

Often the retirees are working and have meager incomes of \$600 to \$700 a month. Expenses for medicine and other vital supplies leave little left in the budget for food, O'Brien said.

The Home Helpers offer couldn't have come at a better time because the food bank has been struggling to collect enough food for the Brown Bag program, she said.

The food drive will collect items such as canned vegetables, fruit and tomatoes, along with whole-grain crackers, peanut butter, canned or bottled 100 percent fruit juice, unsweetened cereal, dried beans, peas, tomato sauce, pasta, flour, rice, canned meats, dried meats, tuna, shelf-stable milk, vegetable oil, shortening, dry milk, low-sodium instant or canned soup and canned evaporated milk.

Donations of adult diapers also are needed. For pets, contributions of cat food, dog food and bird seeds are welcome.

"We are inviting other businesses and organizations to become part of this program," O'Brien said. "They can collect food, volunteer as drivers, help us to prepare the boxes and more. Monetary donations also are welcome."

For information on the food drive or to make a donation, call Home Helpers at (727) 942-2539.

For information about Volunteer Way, call (727) 815-0433 or go to www.thevolunteerway.org.

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