



Press photo by Deb Everts

In the spirit of the season, volunteers from the West Valley Demonstration Project and its subcontractors met at Sander's Parkview Nov. 17 to load and deliver donated food to area pantries right before the holiday.

WVDP volunteers make annual donation to local food pantries

By Deb Everts
Press Reporter

SALAMANCA — To spread good will for the upcoming holiday season, employees from the West Valley Demonstration Project (WVDP) and its subcontractors gathered Friday at Sander's Parkview, volunteering their time and energy to once again distribute food to nine local food pantries.

According to volunteer coordinator Lettie Chilson, this year's WVDP Food Drive fundraising effort included food donations from employees themselves and was responsible for the distribution of 102,000 pounds of food, including 360 turkeys, to area pantries.

Chilson said 40 turkeys will go to each of the nine food pantry sites at Ellicottville, Franklinville, Delevan, West Valley, Little Valley, Cattaraugus, Dayton and two pantries in Springville. She said the total amount of food could change if they get any last minute donations.

"We were able to provide each site with over 200 bags of food to benefit local families," she said. "Some of the sites distribute between 150 to 200 bags, while others do a smaller number, but the larger pantries like Springville and Franklinville have the largest need in Cattaraugus County — and the surrounding area — and we are able to help out a lot."

The food drive started as a drive just for the local West Valley food pantry; Chilson said WVDP has

been doing this drive for over 25 years and every year it has grown. She said all the volunteers for this drive are members of the team, and they have embraced this event as their big team effort charity for the year.

"We've partnered with Sander's Parkview but, in the past, Springville Wal-Mart has provided turkeys," she said. "Wal-Mart would have provided the turkeys again this year, but Parkview was able to get them for us."

A store employee at Sander's Parkview said owners Jake and Mark Sanders participate in this food drive for area pantries because they are very family-oriented and they don't want to see families go without.

Chilson said Sander's Parkview and American B & B are major subcontractors at West Valley. They participate by either donations or through their employees who volunteer.

"So, it really is a team at West Valley, along with our customers, the United States Department of Energy (USDOE) and New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA). All of their employees participate," she said.

Joe Pillittere, communications manager for WVDP, said this is his first year working at the WVDP site, but it's not his first year volunteering for the annual food drive.

"I was here participating in 2000 and 2003 when we did the

food drive, but it has expanded to nine pantries since then," he said. "The drive changes yearly. We collect more food and it gets better every year."

According to Chilson, not only does this collected food cover Thanksgiving, it also carries over toward the Christmas holiday. She said the Friday delivery was what they had on-hand as of Nov. 14, that she can confirm, and the drive continues for two more days. When the final accounting is done, they'll buy additional turkeys for the Christmas season for all the food pantries.

Chilson said since its inception, 1.3 million pounds of food have been distributed from this volunteer program through the West Valley Demonstration facility. Through donations, 102,000 equivalent pounds will be distributed this year, but not everything is in yet.

"The food that was loaded on the truck today at Sander's Parkview was just a representative of all the thousands of pounds of food that has been donated and will be distributed prior to Thanksgiving Day," she said on Friday.

Pillittere said the bottom line really is this type of effort from employees, subcontractors and their partners at the USDOE and NYSERDA really helps build the quality of life for not only the employees, but the community itself.

(Contact reporter Deb Everts at salpressdeb@gmail.com.)