



Jeff Forman/JForman@News-Herald.com

Joann Ramsey, director of the United Willoughby Methodist Church food pantry, stocks shelves recently.

Bare cupboards at food pantries

Tracey Read

TRead@News-Herald.com

People often think of donating groceries during holiday food drives to help the less fortunate.

But this year, those who make sure needy families have enough to eat are asking kind-hearted individuals, businesses and other groups to dip into their cupboards or pocketbooks earlier than usual.

Sue Mize, director of Lake County's 211 phone line for social and county services, said her staff has been taking some unusual calls from food pantry workers lately.

"They are getting nervous," she said. "Some of them are running out of food. Their pantries are bare."

During the past year, there has been a 15 percent increase in the number of people calling 211 to find out where they can go for food.

"Every year, we ask people to bring something. With the economy and the need out there for young families, we felt collecting food would help Lake County the most this year. With the increase in gas prices and the foreclosure crisis, it has a trickle-down effect on grocery prices."

Kristen Cane, Lake County United Way's Basic Solution panel member

About 4,840 people inquired about getting food this year, up from about 4,200 the previous 12 months, said Mize.

Several community groups already have stepped up to help.

For instance, organizers of the 35th annual Volunteer Recognition Event for the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program of Lake County are asking its 500 volunteers to come to a recognition luncheon Sept. 18 at

LaMalfa Centre in Mentor with a donation to Lake County Food Banks.

The "Super 6" most needed items?

That would be canned tuna, canned meat (such as stew), soup, macaroni and cheese, peanut butter and jelly and boxed meals such as Hamburger Helper.

"Every year, we ask people to bring something. With the economy and the need out there for

young families, we felt collecting food would help Lake County the most this year," said Kristen Kane, who sits on the United Way's Basic Solution panel.

"With the increase in gas prices and the foreclosure crisis, it has a trickle-down effect on grocery prices."

The local dental community is teaming up to collect food.

"Share the Harvest" will run from Sept. 15 through Oct. 15 to benefit the Willoughby Food Pantry.

This is the seventh year Drs. Hymie Akst, Ivy Batos and Elena Furman have invited area dentists and their patients to participate in the food drive, which is being offered earlier this year to help with low supplies at the Public Square pantry.

For more information on participating dentists, call (440) 951-1008 or visit www.akstand-batos.com.