

## A SPECIAL NEIGHBORHOOD, CREATING TOGETHERNESS AND HELPING THEIR NEIGHBORS

It seems as if the pace of everyday life is growing faster and faster. Between the endless activities on your weekly schedule, checking your smart phone for emails, texts, and social media updates, your already jam-packed day is gone in a flash. And although things like email and social media can bring people together, nothing can replace the bonds that are built from a one-on-one conversation or the simple act of spending time together with others. In a county as large as Waukesha, it can sometimes seem difficult to build community among your neighbors. It makes one wonder if those small town, neighborly relationships that people reminisce about are still possible. Well, there are families right here in Waukesha that are proving that not only is it possible, they are showing how beneficial it can be for the entire community.

It all started fourteen years ago, when a group of eight families from the Tall Grass, Rolling Ridge, and Meadowbrook subdivisions came together for a Thanksgiving meal and decided they should share some of their good fortune with those in need. A collection was taken up and the group delivered their donation to the FOOD Pantry of Waukesha County (FPWC). When they arrived at The Pantry, the long line of people waiting for help on a cold winter day really made an impression on the group, particularly the children. The food drive's coordinator **Dave Rebro** said, "It really hit home that it could easily be any one of us in that receiving line. It really opened our eyes and touched our hearts."



*With Christmas right around the corner, the holiday spirit is alive and well for these volunteers on the Collection Team for the Neighbors Helping Neighbors Food Drive. The drive is definitely a family affair, with young, old, and everyone in between getting involved in any way they can.*

When the day of the food drive arrives, everyone in the group has a task to do, like setting up cardboard boxes for collecting food, driving collection vehicles throughout the neighborhoods, or even making sure hot drinks are available to keep everyone as warm as possible. Some years keeping warm is easier than others. Since the drive happens rain or shine, the Neighbors Helping Neighbors families have seen it all, from sunshine to rain to snow, from bitterly cold to a year when it was actually very warm for a mid-December day.



*Residents of the Tall Grass, Rolling Ridge, and Meadowbrook subdivisions, among others, have been seeing these signs popping up for the last few weeks. Getting the word out about this drive as early as possible is a big reason why this drive is so successful year after year.*

What started out as a kind gesture fourteen years ago has grown into something much more than a food drive. The group now goes door to door collecting food and funds; adding more subdivisions and more volunteers to grow this significant food drive. Since the drive, known as Neighbors Helping Neighbors Food & Fund Drive, began, a total of **\$32,012** and more than **32 tons** of food has been collected by dedicated neighborhood volunteers and brought to the FPWC. Collecting that amount of food and funds takes a lot of people working together, and working awfully hard to boot. The drive actually begins weeks before the collection day; dozens of yard signs announcing the date of the drive are printed and posted along with hundreds of flyers that are then distributed to every household on the collection route.

This year the families will be joined by some of the neighborhood Girl Scout Troops who will be working on the Prairie Hill Service Area's 2014 Community Service Project, Feed the Need. Neighbors Helping Neighbors organizer **Shannon Majewski** said, "Brownie Troop 4806, led by **Melissa Pehl**, will be a huge help to us this year helping with all of our flyers. We've got girls, leaders, and families participating from Brownies through Senior Girl Scout Troops. Even my high school age Girl Scouts, Senior Troop 2713, will be participating, and I couldn't be more proud of them."

When the drive began fourteen years ago, many of the families had children that were very young. Even though those families have become increasingly busy with their children's obligations, they have made a commitment to continuing this well-loved holiday tradition and each year more and more families have joined the group. Majewski added, "We are always thrilled to have new families join our effort. For many of us, it has become one of the only times we see each other during the year, and that chance to reconnect strengthens us as a community and makes us really appreciate the people within our neighborhoods."

Each year, more and more families have joined the group. And even though many of the young families that started the drive have grown-up and are now increasingly busy with the commitments that older families have, the food drive has become a holiday tradition that the families want to continue. Majewski added, "We are always thrilled to have new families join our effort. For many of us, it has become one of the only times we see each other during the year, and that chance to reconnect strengthens us as a community and makes us really appreciate the people within our neighborhoods."



*The temperatures might be low, but spirits are always high when the Neighbors Helping Neighbors crew shows up at the FOOD Pantry. The group's motto is "Together We Create A Special Neighborhood", and when you get them all together at the Pantry at the end of the drive, you can literally see how special these neighbors really are.*



*The highlight of the day for FPWC Executive Director Karen Tredwell (right) is getting to meet all the families when they come to deliver an early holiday gift to The Pantry. After the 2013 food drive the group brought 2,886 pounds of food into The Pantry and presented Karen with a check for \$4,236. Way to go Neighbors!*

The FPWC and its Executive Director **Karen Tredwell** do their best to keep the group motivated. "The Neighbors Helping Neighbors families help me to remain enthusiastic about our work at the FPWC. Their dedication and enthusiasm are truly inspirational," said Tredwell. Each year following the collection, the families deliver their collections to The Pantry, take a Pantry tour, and hear from Tredwell how The Pantry has served their clients since the previous year's drive. Shannon Majewski said, "Hearing Karen speak re-immerses us in the purpose of what we do each year. The families in our neighborhood have become so invested in this effort – it shows – it's contagious – it lifts your spirit and warms your heart to work together with all of these great people for a really great purpose – it makes you want to come back again... And we do."

The great work that Neighbors Helping Neighbors has done over the years has also inspired other groups within the state to consider starting their own neighborhood food drives, and one of these groups may join this year's collection to see, firsthand, how it's done. If you would like to help the Neighbors Helping Neighbors Food & Fund Drive or would like to learn more about the group and how they make their drive so successful, please visit their website at [www.nhnfooddrive.org](http://www.nhnfooddrive.org).