



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Pete Harckham

Harckham Holds Food Drive in Yorktown Heights

PETE HARCKHAM May 10, 2022

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Yorktown Heights, NY – New York State Senator Pete Harckham held a food drive on Saturday, May 7, at the First Presbyterian Church of Yorktown and collected more than 750 pounds of food and household goods for the First Presbyterian Church of Yorktown Food Pantry, which helps feed some of the neediest members of the Yorktown community, including many seniors. The food drive was in partnership with the church’s food pantry and the New York State United Teachers.

“The need to fight hunger in our communities continues, with many of our neighbors facing food insecurity,” said Harckham. “While it is important to help keep our local food pantries stocked, we also need to keep raising awareness of this situation. As always, I am thankful to all those who donated and

also for the many volunteers who made this a successful event.”

This was the 12th food drive Harckham has hosted. In the eleven prior food drives since March 2020—one each in Sleepy Hollow, Peekskill, Mohegan Lake, Bedford, Pleasantville, Carmel, Croton-on-Hudson and two drives in Mount Kisco and Somers—Harckham and volunteers have collected more than 35,000 pounds of food items and over \$10,000 in cash donations so far.

The food drive in Yorktown Heights was a “Drive-Thru, Drop Off” event. No food was distributed; it was only collected. Volunteers collected bags and boxes of food from each vehicle, and there was no need for drivers to get out of the vehicles.

“Our food pantry is always in need of more donations because the need for food continues,” said Rev. Tami Seidel, co-pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Yorktown. “We are very grateful for the community’s support, which allows us to reach more people.”

The Food Pantry of the First Presbyterian Church of Yorktown has been in operation for over 30 years, said Katharine Frase, one of the church’s lay leaders and a volunteer at the pantry. Food is distributed from 8-11 a.m. on the second and fourth Saturdays of each month. On the second Saturday they distribute diapers, and on the fourth Saturday they provide nutrition shakes and incontinence products to clients over 65.

Most of the church food pantry’s client households have at least one adult working full time, but still suffer from food insecurity, which has been made worse by the pandemic and the current inflationary trends. There are a large number of senior clients, and a distressing number of veterans who need the pantry’s services.

“There are a lot of people in the community who rely on the food pantry here,” said Debbie Bernardini, a co-director of the Food Pantry of the First Presbyterian Church of Yorktown. “This is not a ‘them’ problem, it’s our neighbors not having enough food.”

Prior to the pandemic, the Food Pantry of the First Presbyterian Church of Yorktown assisted an average of 90 households a week. In the summer of 2020, that number had risen to 270, Frase noted, and has now risen to a steady 180 households per pantry. This mirrors a trend the pantry’s leaders experienced during the Great Recession, where food insecurity remained high after unemployment numbers receded—“Not surprising if you think about the mechanics of debt,” said Frase.

The Food Pantry is housed within the church buildings but operates independently of the church’s operating budget. Along with the support of the Yorktown community for contributions of volunteer time,

financial contributions and food donations, the pantry relies heavily on Feeding Westchester to stock its shelves.

“A lot of the items we want to offer our clients became scarce during the pandemic because of supply chain issues, but community donations have been helpful to keep our stock up,” said Liam McAuliffe, a co-director of the Food Pantry of the First Presbyterian Church of Yorktown. “We work hard to establish interpersonal relationships, too, with the clients. We realize it’s not always easy to ask for help in the community in which you live.”