



REMEMBERING THE BEGINNING - November, 2010

As I loaded the template and prepared to assemble this month’s pantry news, it occurred to me that the pantry has really become sustainable - it’s working as we’d always hoped - and no longer needs this newsletter to keep everyone apprised of pantry news. Next month’s newsletter will be the last. This is a strange feeling for someone who has been part of the pantry since before its inception - it’s been a part of me - and so, this month I’m asking your permission to reflect on a very brief synopsis of the pantry’s humble beginnings.

Nearly 20 years ago, Kiwanis hosted a speaker who spoke on “Hunger in Alliance.” It so moved one member, Dave Puterbaugh, that he felt compelled to investigate much further and a committee was formed to study the issue. The end result was that Kiwanis started a One Day Food Distribution on the last Friday of many months each year - first at the Salvation Army, later at Robertsons, and finally on west State Street. Nine months each year, 10,000 pounds of food was distributed to approx. 500 residents. Kiwanis was joined in the effort by area churches, who chose to sponsor a month (\$1,000 and 25 volunteers - coordinated through Kiwanis). This continued for a couple of years but Dave felt that food,



These Kiwanians worked the One Day Food Distributions 13-14 years ago. Many are still working at the pantry.



Dave Puterbaugh, Betsy Cornell and Barb Armitage, some of the original team.

one day a month, wasn’t enough. He used to say, “If your house is on fire, you don’t want the fire truck scheduled on one day - you want it available. If your kids are hungry, it may not be during the last week of the month.” Again, a committee from Kiwanians, First Christian Church, Alliance of Churches and Betsy Cornell from Alliance City Schools, studied the “Best Practices in Food Pantries” over 18 months and developed the vision for what eventually became the Alliance Community Pantry. Betsy, Barb and Dave met regularly through the years to review and talk about pantry progress. (Betty Rush, Matt Stinson, Mike Patterson and First Christian Church were also part of the 18 month planning.)

The committee worked with The Akron Canton Foodbank and the Alliance community to formalize our vision. We wanted five key components: 1) A pantry that would be opened both mornings and evenings to accommodate people’s schedules; 2) A pantry totally run by volunteers with no paid staff; 3) A pantry that was in the north side of town where grocery stores were scarce, 4) A pantry that would have meat, produce, and dairy as well as canned goods; and 5) A choice pantry where people could select what their family would eat (which we were until covid). We felt if we could make these things happen, it could support itself with the community’s support. We wrote grants to pay for the building and a truck; we found a building and assembled help to transform it into a food pantry. We spread the word and we hoped people would come.

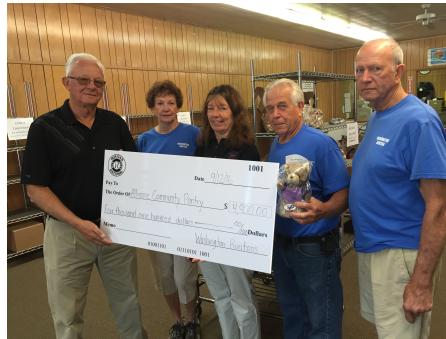
We opened November, 2010, owning our warehouse, our truck and the food we distributed, thanks to large donations from United Presbyterian Church, the Greater Alliance Foundation and grants. Since that time we have been sustained by some grants, lots of elbow work, and volunteers, but mostly we have been sustained by donors—individuals, churches, businesses, clubs and organizations.



Some have given money and food, and many have invented unusual ways to create donations for the pantry - the Turkey Bowl, Light-Up

the-Lakes, Buildings Made of Food Cans, etc. Together these have built a pantry that has weathered it all for 12 years in November.

We have also had volunteers who educated our clients (KSU nursing students and UMU classes) and cleaned (UMU students from many



fraternities, clubs and the Regula Center). We have educated students from area schools and worked to help Alliance. Many years we distributed over a million pounds of food.



I have produced a newsletter (with Mike Patterson’s continued photographic help) each month since our beginning—155 total. These tell our history—our crises from burning truck to new roof—our celebrations from new computer systems working to hitting a million pounds of food distributed in one year—our changes in practices and protocols, (number of days open, changes due to covid, etc)—changes in personnel from managers to board members.

But two things have never changed - we’ve always had enough volunteers to open and we’ve always had enough donations to pay our bills. We are grateful!

In my analysis, these are the things that made us successful. Hats off to the hundreds of volunteers and to the many businesses, churches, and community people who donated money and food and time. Margaret Mead was right when she said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed individuals can change the world. In fact, it’s the only thing that ever has.”



And hat’s off to Dave for his unwavering dedication and commitment to creating a place where anyone in Alliance who needed food could get it.