



HISTORY OF PANTRY SHARED WITH ALLIANCE LIONS CLUB

Mike Patterson, vice president of the Alliance Community Pantry board of directors and head of Operations, was recently honored to speak and share the history of the Alliance Community Pantry at the Alliance Lions Club's Rose Day Kickoff Dinner. He began by sharing his thoughts on how the support the Pantry has had in its first 16 years clearly illustrates what a caring, supporting and loving community we have.

The Pantry, which is an all-volunteer operation, serves about a fourth of the population of Alliance and they have never had to have a formal fundraiser. He said the Pantry's reputation has been key to its success.

He explained the first spark for a community pantry began when the Alliance Kiwanis Club heard a program on the hunger needs in Alliance in 2006 by Lisa Miller, then executive director of the Alliance of Churches.

Hearing of the tremendous need, a small Kiwanis committee guided by Dave Puterbaugh, along with Barb Armitage, Matt Stinson, Betsy Cornell, Gloria Magrath, and Pam Bruno, associate pastor at First Christian Church, started working on a solution.

To start, the Kiwanis club organized monthly food distributions nine months a year in various available warehouse facilities where the Akron-Canton Foodbank would bring a truckload of food to Alliance, and volunteers and sponsors were recruited to pass out bags of groceries on the last Friday of the month. More than 500 families would line up every month.

With the needs so obvious, Puterbaugh and his team searched around town and found the site for a permanent location, and the Alliance Community Pantry opened on Market Street across from the caboose for the first time Nov. 15, 2010. It has operated as an all-volunteer, non-profit organization since then through broad based community support from churches, service organizations, corporations, businesses, schools, and individuals.

Originally it was set up like a little grocery store where clients would register and then wait to go through the store, selecting their choice of food products based on the size of their family. They were accompanied by volunteer "shoppers" just to help them make decisions not to limit their choices.

But then Covid hit and things had to change. Social distancing was a requirement so, rather than shopping, the pantry had to have clients register and then drive up in front and grocery baskets would be rolled out to their cars to be unloaded. This technique of delivering food continues today because clients found it faster than going through the store and making selections, and it takes fewer volunteers to operate as we do now.

Numbers dropped off clearly in 2021 after the Covid pandemic hit, but thanks to dedicated loyal financial supporters and pantry volunteers who never stopped, major adjustments were made for ways to serve clients, plus non-stop support throughout the community.

The pantry always kept an eye on its mission of, "Working within the community to end hunger."

As the Alliance Community Pantry heads into its 16th year of serving the community, the statistics clearly illustrate its numbers quickly picked up to pre-Covid levels as more than one million pounds of food were given out last year.

In 2025, the pantry was visited 14,767 times by 2,086 different households which housed 6,570 individuals. That is 894 more households and 3,063 more individuals that came to be served in 2021 when Covid started. The pantry also served 618 new first-time clients last year.

The amount of food received and passed out in 2025 increased dramatically. Pantry clients went home with 1,160,073 pounds of food which included 1,045,412 purchased from the Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank which was picked up by volunteer truckers making 98 trips on Monday and Wednesday mornings.

The pantry also had 86,121 pounds of food donated from a variety of sources. Among those businesses who consistently donate weekly or more are Aldi, Panera Bread, and Giant Eagle.



Mike Patterson, Alliance Community Pantry vice president, left, received the Lions Club Distinguished Service Award from Alliance Lions Club President Bill Prueter at the Lions Club's Sept. 10 Rose Day Kickoff Dinner.

KIA'S GENEROUS DONATION

It's companies such as Ken Ganley Kia Alliance that allows us to maintain our mission of, "Working within the community to end hunger!"

Another prime example was one September afternoon when Kia general manager Josh Davis, along with three fellow employees, delivered a \$3,450 check to pantry general manager Debbie Skubiak along with 432 pounds of a wide variety of food donations.

The check was the result of Kia's donation of \$50 for

each of the 69 new cars they sold in August, and the food came from employees and some funds earmarked for food purchases.

Josh is seen here presenting the check to Debbie as Xander Dugan, Gavin Nagy and Jami Fisher, of Kia, look on.

The Kia team unloaded the food donations which were later weighed by Debbie.



MEIJER SIMPLY GIVES

Since the Meijer store opened its Alliance store in May 2024, they have been one of our most loyal and consistent supporters. They have once again selected our Alliance Community Pantry as the recipient of their Simply Give program in which Meijer will match any customer's \$10 donation, with all proceeds going to our Pantry. The program began Sunday, Sept. 27, and will run 13 weeks through Saturday, Dec. 26.

All a customer has to do is grab a Meijer Simply Give \$10 donation card when checking out, and with Meijer matching it, \$20 will go to the pantry.

They have also designated Saturday, December 12 as double match day. For every \$10 Simply Give card purchased on that date, Meijer will provide an additional contribution of \$20, bringing the total to \$30 for a single customer purchase going to the pantry. Meijer will match up to \$5,000 in contributions on double match day.

All donations will be converted into Meijer food-coupons which will be given to our pantry to help

us stock our shelves with food that may not be available from the Akron-Canton Foodbank. Meijer's Simply Give program is designed to help feed hungry families in the communities they serve.

Our pantry, located at 215 E. Market St., is open Mondays and Wednesdays from 4 to 7 p.m. and Tuesdays from 9 a.m. to noon.



MOUNT CLASS HELPS OUT

As she does every semester, Mount Union professor Beth Simbro has students in her classes get acquainted with and help out at our Alliance Community Pantry. That happened again one Friday morning as five students in her Women's Health class came down and learned about the Pantry from pantry manager Debbie Skubiak, and spent time helping out moving things but mostly cleaning.

All of the students were freshmen, so it was their first experience at the Pantry, and with Mount Union's traditional involvement during the school year they will certainly be back again.

Volunteering were Adelynn Kopp, Kaylynn Carpenter, Ja' Niya Moten, Layna Sanor, and Callie Pierce-Henneman.



ALLIANCE COMMUNITY PANTRY BOARD

Jim Perone-Pres., Jim Greiner-Treas., Bruce Helsel-Past Pres, Mike Patterson-VP Operations, Chris Schade-Sec., Jan Horning, Missy Miller, Betsy Brown, Pat Gates, Cathy Henderson, Cindy Magda, Andy Magda, Beth Simbro, Kim Cully, Rudy Roggenkamp, Cathy Torma

