



Harvest Drive Helps Families in Need

BY STACEY BOMSER

THE HARVEST DRIVE IS CELEBRATING ITS 19TH season of giving. As each year passes the need grows greater and greater. This year, the goal is to feed 2,000 families across Broward County. That's a huge step-up from just a few years ago when Harvest Drive helped only a few hundred families out of its home base at Country Isles Elementary.

As the need grew, so did Harvest Drive. Today it serves the entire county with distribution sites at eight schools, including its flagship site at Western High School. "We moved to Western three years after we outgrew Country Isles, but it will always be our home and hold a dear place in our hearts," states Harvest Drive Inc. Founder Renee

Herman, noting that they still hold a pep rally each year at Country Isles Elementary to promote Harvest Drive.

The program started as a simple food drive with children donating cans of food for the holidays. Although the program has now grown into a year-round endeavor, children remain at the helm of all collections. "Our mission has always been to teach children at a young age that their contributions can make a difference in the lives of others," explains Herman.

From elementary school through high school, and beyond, students help collect, sort and distribute the tens of thousands of grocery items donated to needy families each year. "The kids in schools make this happen. We couldn't do it without our students," says Herman.

She also credits students for coming up with some clever ways to raise money and awareness. For instance, Western High School collected canned goods at their Homecoming. "These children are so inspiring," says Herman. "They truly want to help and do whatever is within their means to make Harvest Drive happen each year. They are the ones who keep us going."

This momentum is very important as the Harvest Drive gears up. Soon, at schools throughout the county, volunteers will collect, sort and distribute a complete Thanksgiving meal and a week's worth of grocery staples, along with personal hygiene and household necessities. They are hoping to serve 2,000 families this year, making this the biggest Harvest Drive to date. Last year they helped 1,582 families.

"We receive more and more requests every day," shares Herman. "It's worse now than in the past because so many teachers were laid off. I'm getting calls from former teachers who used to help with Harvest Drive now asking me for help. It's truly heartbreaking."

Harvest Drive is more than just a holiday food drive. It strives to help families in need throughout the year. "People need our help even after Harvest Drive is done," explains Herman. "That's why last year we started a food pantry at Western High School. It was stocked with soups and pasta, and other staple items. The food was there to make sure students don't go hungry."

At the end of the school year, they hosted a Spring Harvest Drive. "We gave to our neediest families. And you know what's really incredible? Six of the 25 were students who had been helping us all year."

Harvest Drive also gets a great deal of support from businesses and organizations in the Weston community, specifically the Rotary Club of Weston, Saint Katharine Drexel Church and Top Drawer Media Solutions. But the



Children are at the helm of all Harvest Drive collections. Students from Cypress Bay and Western high schools help collect donations outside Publix.



Harvest Drive Founder Renee Herman (center) poses with Chief Worker Bees Kim O'Neill (left) and Patti Bradley.



Each year Harvest Drive fills the Western High School gymnasium with thousands of bags ready for distribution to needy families.



Wednesday, November 16th is Community Drop-off Day at Western High School. Stop by to drop off your donation or stay and help sort.

ultimate success of Harvest Drive rests on the generosity of the community. "This started as a grass roots effort to feed the hungry and in many ways we still are," states Herman. "In order to provide for all of these families we need people to donate."

You can help Harvest Drive by donating non-perishable items such as canned cranberries and sweet potatoes for Thanksgiving dinner, as well as everyday grocery items such as canned tuna, cereal, peanut butter, and macaroni and cheese. No jars please. Grocery gift cards and monetary donations are always welcome to help purchase perishable items.

In addition to food, Harvest Drive distributes hygiene items including toothpaste, shampoo, dish soap and laundry detergent. Harvest Drive also accepts new and gently used clothing, shoes, toys, books and bicycles.

All of the Weston schools support Harvest Drive. This month students are being asked to bring in canned goods and non-perishable items. Herman suggests taking advantage of the Buy One Get One Free deals at Publix. "If you're buying it anyhow, why not donate the extra item to Harvest Drive? And, if you are shopping specifically for Harvest Drive you can purchase twice as much!"

Donations can also be dropped off at Western High School on Wednesday, November 16th from 3-9pm. Stop by to watch the spectacle as the gym transforms into a grocery warehouse. Then the following day, from sun-up to sun-down, volunteers will be busy sorting items and packing bags. If you have time to spare, stop by to lend a helping hand. Finally, on Friday, November 18th, the families arrive to pick up their packages.

For more information on how you can help support Harvest Drive, call (954) 444-5548 or visit www.harvestdriveflorida.com. Check out the website to see pictures and videos from past Harvest Drives. Monetary donations can be mailed to: Harvest Drive Inc., 5190 NW 165 Street, Miami, FL 33014. Harvest Drive is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. It assures that 100% of donations go directly to families in need.