

NiaCAP brings home hope, help for the holidays

This month, about 650 people will ask for a bag of food at the Niagara Community Action Program's Lockport office on Washburn Street.

Nearer to the holidays, the NiaCAP food pantry will be distributing holiday meals as well. The Food Bank of Western New York helps, but it's mostly local people donating to help others, said Carol Palumbo, NiaCAP's family development and nutrition supervisor.

Behind the scenes, making it possible to distribute tons of food to those in need, are regular volunteers like Andrew Boskat. The Barker man works on a goat farm but has also been helping at NiaCAP's Lockport pantry practically full time in recent weeks. He's been volunteering at the pantry since about 2001, Boskat said.

Why put in eight-hour days at a food pantry?

"I just want to give back for all that's been given to me. I'm old school. I grew up on a farm, and I'd rather have something to do than nothing. I like helping others—always have, and I always will."

What's there to do?

"You have to put bags inside of bags to carry food—the canned goods are heavy. Stock shelves. Keep the place clean. There's always something to do, the way I look at it. I try not to put off to tomorrow what I can do today."

On the shelf, off the shelf, rinse, repeat?

"It's like working at a grocery store."

Can you keep up with the demand?

"Yes. I like to have everything ready and not run around like a chicken with my head cut off. I don't want to keep people waiting, because I know how it is.

"Then we get deliveries at the same time. It can get a little hectic, but we manage."

So you work in the back and hand out food, too?

"We bag them up, then take orders to the front. They have to sign the yellow slip. Then if they need help taking it to their cars, I do that."

There's even curbside service?

"If they need help, I'm there to help people out."

Are you busier than ever at the holidays?

"There's a lot of needy people out there. If you don't believe that, just look in the newspaper."