

Time flies

Food Drive celebrates 20 years of feeding the hungry

May 12 will mark an important milestone for the NALC's Stamp Out Hunger national food drive.

"It's our 20th anniversary," NALC President Fredric Rolando noted. "For two decades now, our annual national drive has proved critical in helping millions of American families—our customers—who are struggling to make ends meet during this continuing recession.

"Each year, the second Saturday in May is a day when all citizens have an opportunity, with the help of their letter carrier, to easily donate food to needy families in their community," he said.

The drive, the largest one-day food-collection event in the nation, has been a success every year, Rolando said, but the needs are particularly sad, even staggering, in 2012.

"Sixteen percent of all Americans are at risk of hunger—uncertain where their next meal may be coming from. That includes 1 in 5 children under the age of 18, plus 4 million seniors who are forced every day to choose between paying a utility bill and buying food," he said.

"Last year, despite many obstacles, letter carriers proudly collected 70.2 million pounds of food, raising the total amount of donations picked up over the history of the drive to more than 1.1 billion pounds," Rolando said. "With help from our brothers and sisters in the rural craft, alongside other postal employees and volunteers, letter carriers will do what we can again this year to help all Americans."

Support pours in

As this magazine went to press, the number of registered branches for the 2012 food drive already had topped 1,200, with more signing up every day.

Providing these branches and volunteers a much-appreciated boost are the drive's official sponsors: the National Rural

Letter Carriers' Association, Campbell Soup Company, Valpak, U.S. Postal Service, United Way, AFL-CIO, Feeding America, Uncle Bob's Self-Storage and AARP.

"We are proud to continue our support of the annual food drive," NRLCA President Jeannette Dwyer said. "It has become clear how such a small act of charity on the part of one person can resonate so profoundly in the communities in which we live."

Realizing that reminder postcards are key components in drumming up customer participation in the food drive, Campbell's is donating 75 million postcards to help the cause.

"The employees of Campbell Soup Company share your passion for ensuring the health and welfare of individuals in every community," Campbell's President Denise Morrison said. "As we approach May 12, we pledge to work to ensure that every community rallies support for the NALC food drive."

Another proven method of motivating customers to donate non-perishable food—including pet food—has been to provide them with special "Stamp Out Hunger" grocery bags. Campbell's has pledged a donation of 1 million such bags to be distributed in select locations. International Paper is providing bags in certain areas, while Publix, the grocery store chain with more than 1,000 locations in the Southeast, is donating bags in Florida, Georgia and South Carolina.

AARP is kicking in more 13.5 million bags as well, to be delivered to selected states where senior-citizen hunger is a major problem. "Through 'Drive to End Hunger,' AARP has made our own commitment to solve the problem of hunger among older Americans," AARP Foundation President Jo Ann Jenkins said. "Our support for Stamp Out Hunger is an important part of this effort." AARP also



will promote the drive through articles and advertisements in its membership magazine, and hundreds of volunteers representing the organization will be out in force on May 12 to help sort and distribute food collections.

A never-ending need

The NALC drive began at the local level in the late 1980s and went nationwide in 1992. Twenty years later, letter carriers all across America—including Puerto Rico, Guam and the Virgin Islands—still lead the charge in the sadly ongoing battle against hunger, helping to stock food banks, pantries and shelters for the summer months.

“This year, we enter the drive amidst a ‘perfect storm’ of high unemployment, sky-high food and gasoline prices, unprecedented budget cuts to federal nutrition programs, limits on charitable-giving incentives and a decline in federal commodities,” Feeding America President Vicki Escarra said. “Some of our larger food banks are reporting declines in food inventories of as much as 35 percent from last year.

“Few are more committed to ending hunger in America than letter carriers,” she said. “You are the ones on the front line of the poverty battlefield. You see and console the very same people who come to us for emergency food assistance, often before we see them.”

In a letter to President Rolando, Postmaster General Patrick Donahoe expressed the Postal Service’s strong support of the drive.

“With most school lunch programs suspended during summer months, millions of children must find alternate sources of nutrition,” Donahoe said. “I look forward to working with you to make a difference as our carriers, other postal employees and citizens in communities throughout our nation deliver for families in need through the food drive.”

Solidarity and support

AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka also backed the drive and asked the labor federation’s affiliates, state federations and central labor councils to join the NALC in promoting and conducting the event.

“With America still reeling with devastating unemployment, the Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive comes at a critical time,” he said. “With the support of unions all across America, the NALC can set a record in collections, helping those who have lost their jobs in this economy and the millions more facing economic uncertainty.”

“Last May, for the eighth consecutive year, the food drive collected more than 70 million pounds of food in one day,” United Way President Brian Gallagher said, “a testament to the dedication and commitment of a strong network working together for a worthy cause, and we are pleased that United Way will continue to partner with the NALC.”

Jim Sampey, Valpak’s chief operating officer, said his company is honored to again be part of this year’s campaign, “our way of saying ‘thank you’ to the men and women who deliver the Valpak blue envelopes to more than 40 million U.S. households each month.”

And Uncle Bob’s Self-Storage President Kenneth Myszka said his company is “proud and humbled” to do its part by donating its fleet of rental trucks to collect donated food. “We look forward to our continued partnership with the NALC, and we pledge to help however possible in each of the markets in which we operate,” he said.

Back again as the drive’s celebrity spokesperson is singer and “America’s Got Talent” host Nick Cannon, and this year’s special “Family Circus” artwork is dedicated to the memory of longtime supporter and “Family Circus” cartoonist Bil Keane, who died in November.

The official coordinator’s manual and other materials have been sent to food drive coordinators of branches that already have registered for the 2012 drive. Branches must register each year if they plan to participate. The packet includes poster order forms, a DVD featuring a public-service announcement suitable for broadcast and promotional artwork, plus tips for running a successful local drive.

Questions regarding the food drive should be directed to NALC Director of Community Services Linda Giordano at 202-662-2489 or at giordano@nalc.org.

