

Bare shelves have Christmas Cheer turning people away

By Kathryn Reed

Christmas Cheer – the year-round-food bank in South Lake Tahoe – could not open its doors Wednesday because it didn't have enough food to give to the growing number of people seeking its help.



“A lot of people think these people are on welfare and just taking advantage, but so many come in crying and are so embarrassed to be there,” director Virginia Buffington said.

Christmas Cheer is assisting about 700 households or 1,700 people a month. While the numbers are about the same as last year, they are well above the historical average for the nonprofit.

What is causing the problem is donations – financial and food – are considerably less than years past.

People in need can get one bag or box of food a month. They have different items depending on how many people need to be fed.

For the homeless, Christmas Cheer tries to provide them with canned goods with pull tops because they don't have can openers.

Mostly it's non-perishable food people get. Macaroni and cheese – things that are a meal in a box – are good donations, Buffington said.

Peanut butter and beans help provide protein.

Cash is the best donation because Christmas Cheer can purchase items from the food bank at 18 cents a pound. This way the money goes farther than when they have to shop at local grocery stores.

However, with donations to the food banks down, Christmas Cheer has been shopping at local stores.

Grocery Outlet is having a food drive for Christmas Cheer all of July. The charity is going to put its familiar barrels that are usually just seen at the holidays out at more locations this summer as a way to remind people the need is not just seasonal.

Christmas Cheer, which is run entirely by volunteers, gives out food Sundays from 2-4pm, and Monday and Wednesday from 11am-2pm. Donations may be dropped off then or call Buffington at (530) 208.8359 to arrange a specific time. Checks may be sent to P.O. Box 14489, South Lake Tahoe, CA 96151.