

Tahoe's needy, other nonprofits (except Christmas Cheer) praise EDC Food Bank



Diane Rawski, from left, Carson Alexander and Jennifer Patterson help at the Dec. 2 El Dorado County Food Bank distribution. Photo Copyright 2015 Carolyn E. Wright

By Kathryn Reed

Carson Alexander had to choose between school and volunteering. He chose volunteering.

The South Tahoe High School senior skipped class one day last week in order to help the El Dorado County Food Bank.

He assisted several of the nearly 80 people who showed up at the American Legion Hall parking lot in South Lake Tahoe to get frozen chicken and seafood, and pantry staples. Normally that number is closer to 200, but the truck came a week late because of the snow.

“Without this, I don’t know what I would be eating,” Steve, who was waiting in line, told *Lake Tahoe News*. He went from making \$120,000 a year as a truck driver to existing on \$900 a month.

He has a 17-year-old son who is an athlete who he is trying to keep fed. Steve said he has lost 40 pounds “because of starving.”

Renee is disabled, raising two kids on her own. Child support is limited.

“It’s a difficult position to be in to need help,” she said. But she is also thankful and grateful for those who make this allocation possible.

For Diane she is most thankful for the protein the Food Bank distributes, and the fact that the food is healthy.

They all praised the summer farmers’ market where the Food Bank brings fresh produce.



In 2015, El Dorado Food Bank has provided 176,071 pounds of food to people and nonprofits in South Lake Tahoe. Photo Copyright 2015 Carolyn E. Wright

The Dec. 2 truck was the last one for the year. The next one is not scheduled until late January. The truck comes once a month to hand out food to people who qualify based on their income. The truck also makes rounds to about a half dozen nonprofits to fill their pantries.

Diane Weidinger, who runs Bread & Broth, said her nonprofit depends on the Food Bank.

“If it wasn’t for the product we get from (them), we would have to buy everything. That would cost a lot of money,” Weidinger told *Lake Tahoe News*. “We receive all of our protein from the Food Bank.”

Bread & Broth makes a hot meal every Monday for about 100

people. The organization just started Bread & Broth 4 Kids, which provides food for youngsters and their families over the weekend. B&B also works with Lake Tahoe Presbyterian Church to provide soup to the needy every Friday through a program called Second Serving.

In South Lake Tahoe, the Family Resource Center, Kelly Ridge Senior Apartments, and Senior Plaza Apartments also receive goods from the Food Bank.

The Food Bank is a nonprofit based on the West Slope. It has nothing to do with county government.

But not every entity on the South Shore likes the Food Bank.

“I hate them,” Joann Shope with Christmas Cheer told *Lake Tahoe News*.

She and Mike Sproull, who runs the Food Bank, don't have nice things to say about each other's organization.



Protein and fresh produce are welcome deliveries from the El Dorado County Food Bank truck. Photo Copyright 2015 Carolyn E. Wright

There was a time when the Food Bank supplied Christmas Cheer. Shope contends they were given things people wouldn't eat, like kale. Sproull said some of what he gets is from the U.S.

Department of Food and Agriculture. He doesn't have total control over what his warehouse is filled with.

Shope believes the two organizations are similar. The reality is her group is only helping their clients, which she claims is 1,000 a month, and the Food Bank is helping people directly as well as other nonprofits.

Christmas Cheer is always claiming to be out of cash, with bare shelves.

"We need turkeys badly or hams or anything; food or cash," Shope said last week. This is for the annual distribution of a Christmas dinner that takes place Dec. 21-22 at South Tahoe Middle School.

Shope pays thousands of dollars a year to get food from the Nevada Food Bank.

Most of the nonprofits using the El Dorado County Food Bank pay \$25 a month. Bread & Broth upped its payment to \$100/month last year.

"We feel because of our Adopt a Day program and how successful it is we want to support (the Food Bank). It is important to nonprofits that the truck comes up once a month with product. We all depend on it," Weidinger said.

The Food Bank got the attention of the folks who distribute funds from the American Century Championship golf tournament, receiving a check for \$7,500 this fall. Christmas Cheer got nothing. The Food Bank must spend all of that money on the South Shore.

Shope and Christmas Cheer board member Tom Davis have criticized that decision.

"We are sophisticated. We know how to raise money," Sproull said. In the South Lake Tahoe community alone the Food Bank supplies more than \$300,000 worth of food a year.

His goal is to have a warehouse on the South Shore. While Sproull has talked to folks here about doing so, it has not come to fruition. There is only so much land available for such an enterprise, and so many volunteers who could make it work.

Sproull envisions it would be open four to five days a week for people to get food. That is what Christmas Cheer is afraid of because then it might not be relevant.

The warehouse would also then be a site where nonprofits could come get food. What the nonprofits would likely have to give up is some control and the direct access to donors like grocery stores.