



JERRY ZOLYNSKY/staff photographer

Volunteers Christopher Dannard (left), Anibal Mercado and James Goss load canned and dry food stuffs for shipment to an emergency pantry.



JERRY ZOLYNSKY/staff photographer

Gene Gony, president of Gleaners Food Bank, lifts a frozen turkey out of a bin. Gleaners got a good price on the turkeys, which were butchered due to the summer's heat. The food bank has freezers and semi-trucks for storing some perishables for later pickup by emergency pantries.

Many go hungry at holidays in spite of county's wealth

By Sandra Armbruster
staff writer

Food drives and good organization are needed to help feed the hungry this holiday season, already beset by a shortage of federal commodities. "We have about the same number of people who need help as in past years," said Gene Gony of the Gleaners Food Bank. "But one of the dilemmas is that federal subsidies of butter and cheese are slowly being used up."

A study by the Hunger Task Force found 673,000 people in metropolitan Detroit went hungry despite food banks that operate throughout southeastern Michigan. The task force is a coalition of civic, corporate and volunteer organizations.

BEHIND THE numbers are 41,000 people on public assistance in Oakland County who are receiving only 75 percent of food stamps they need for total month, according to Jim Macy of the Food Bank of Oakland County. The food bank is a network of 80 emergency pantries. "They have a four-week month with a three-week supply of food," he said. "With the lack of public transportation, the pressure is very intense. With what's left, they buy food."

Additional thousands of people are young families that are working low paying service jobs. "A couple can work a 70-hour week and still fall below the poverty level," he added.

Tom Frommeyer, human resources director for the city of Southfield, recalled one such couple who just had a baby but no money for formula. "It's more difficult to be poor in an affluent community than in a community where everyone is poor," he said.

Added to those problems are the heavy demand during the months of November and December, when "we go into our campaigns to raise as much money as we can," Trice said. "The time the holidays are over, we've exhausted all our resources."

FOOD BANKS such as Gleaners are operating in facilities purchased by foundations and corporations who also help pay operating costs. The food banks store a wide variety of food, which is repackaged to fit the needs of smaller emergency pantries.

Besides collecting donations of food, food banks also must find the money to pay for transportation of donations. Macy recalled that the Oakland County bank recently got 8,000 boxes of cereal simply by paying the freight of six cents each.

Trice warned that people shouldn't expect the need to go away when the holidays are over. "They should know that hunger is a problem year round it doesn't stop. If people are interested, they can contact us at 983-4230 and we'll put them in touch with a group (emergency pantry) in their area."

THAT'S DESPITE the best efforts of volunteer-based community groups to feed the hungry. In Oakland County, 68 groups provided an average of 305,890 emergency meals to 15,250 people every month, according to Richard Trice of the Southeast Michigan Food Coalition. Besides Pontiac, most of the cases are in southern Oakland County communities.

SEMFCO is an umbrella organization for other area food banks, acting as an information or resource center, and operating education and advocacy efforts with groups such as the legislators.

In Wayne County outside of Detroit, there are 63 groups providing 245,100 emergency meals every month to 11,700 individuals in western suburbs including Livonia, Redford, Plymouth and Canton.

The greatest growth in poverty has been in rural areas because there is no infrastructure to distribute food, Gony said.

"Whenever farms are in trouble, people move to the city and the city doesn't need anymore," he continued.

TO FEED SOME of these people, Gleaners Food Bank, the original one in the metropolitan area, usually receives nine million pounds of food a year. This year the federal subsidy is amounting to less than half a million, according to Gony.

Unless reserves are found to support community groups that act as emergency food distribution points, area soup kitchens can expect to be hard hit this year.

Gony describes it as a "well-kept secret" that politicians aren't talking about.

The problem is beginning to "stabilize at this point," SEMFCO's Trice said.

THE SHORTAGES of commodities occurred when the U.S. Department of Agriculture "stopped further purchases" after believing it had met the objectives of the earlier program, Trice said.

Now a Hunger-Emergency Relief Act passed last month will provide for 1988-89 about half of what previous allocations amounted to. "We look for a resumption, but not up to normal level. It's not written in stone," he said.

That's only one of the problems facing food banks, according to Trice. Federal Emergency Management Agency grants are usually received in April and spent by mid-summer. That leaves church-related and other volunteer food distribution centers, which make up 85 percent of the total, paying operating costs on their own.

Stores help with relief efforts

Five supermarket chains are working in cooperation with area food banks and the food industry to gather canned and dry goods for the hungry.

The unprecedented effort involves Kroger, Farmer Jack, A&P, Great

Scott and Foodland Distributors. Fifty manufacturers of national brand food products also are participating in the "Help Food Banks Feed the Hungry" campaign, which kicks off today and runs through December.

While shopping, customers will be able to purchase designated "food bank specials" for the metropolitan area-wide food drive. The food will be distributed by area food banks to emergency pantries in the area.

Every Suit on Sale!

ADAMS ROW SUITS Just in time for the holidays! Our entire selection of premium worsted-wool blend year-round suits are expertly tailored in both classic and contemporary styles. Available with pleated or plain front pants. Sizes 36-46. Reg. \$185 & \$200. Sizes 48 and up slightly higher. **\$149**

STRATHMORE SUITS Show off your good taste with a luxurious 100% pure wool suit. Made from the world's finest worsted wools, these expertly tailored suits feature a variety of fabrications from windowpane plaids to subtle stripings. Available in single or double breasted styles with pleated or plain front pants. Sizes 36-46. Reg. \$250. Sizes 48 and up slightly higher. **\$189**

Free expert alterations. Made In America. Sale ends Saturday, November 19.

Richman Brothers
A GOOD SUIT AT A GOOD PRICE

Novi Town Center • Eastland Mall • Livonia Mall • Southland Mall • Lakeside Mall • Westland Center
Ladieswear available only at Westland Center and Livonia Mall
All Stores Open Sunday • Major Credit Cards Accepted.

JUST LOOK AT THESE
FABULOUS FASHIONS...
ADORABLE ACCESSORIES...
GREAT GIFTS...
AND THE SERVICE IS
SENSATIONAL!

OF COURSE.
IT'S BETTER
ON THE BOARDWALK.

theboardwalk

Orchard Lake Road South of Maple • West Bloomfield
Sundays 12-5 p.m. (Thanksgiving-Christmas) Weeknights 11-8 (December 15-23)