

# Economic crisis is food crisis, too



**P**eople losing jobs they once thought were secure. Home values dropping off the cliff. Credit dried up. Family budgets gone topsy-turvy. The result of this economic tumult has been millions of additional families straining to put nutritional meals on the table while managing to pay their essential bills.

At the same time, food banks are having it rough. Many are being forced to turn away folks in need. Donations are down and demand is up.

All you have to do is read your local newspaper or turn on the television. The nation's economic crisis has become a national food crisis, too.

Across America, in state after state, food banks, pantries and shelters are counting on letter carriers to come through on May 9 in the 17th annual NALC National Food Drive to "Stamp Out Hunger."

Year after year, the NALC drive has been the best in the nation, collecting almost 1 billion pounds of donations and delivering the goods to those in need in local communities. But NALC President William H. Young says that, as successful as the food drive has been in the past, it simply must be even better this year.

"Millions and millions of families are suffering—struggling to make ends meet and put food on the table," Young said. "More than ever, food banks, pantries and shelters need our help this year. As families count on them for sup-

port, they're counting on us and we must not back off on our commitment."

Young also noted that donations are particularly critical at this time, since most school lunch programs are suspended during the summer months and millions of children must find alternate sources of nutrition.

## Coast-to-coast need

A quick survey of food distribution agencies from coast to coast reveals the dire need.

Linda Tataliba, executive director of the Food Bank of the State College Area in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, told WJAC-TV that half the families coming in for aid are using the food bank for the first time and many aren't who you might expect.

"We have several gentlemen, fully clad in suits and with briefcases...just walk in the door" looking for help, she said.

Her story was echoed by Mark Lowry, director of the Orange County (CA) Food Bank, whose facility, despite being surrounded by million-dollar beach homes, is in an unending battle to feed the hungry due to an enormous increase in demand over the past year.

"We simply don't have enough resources at the moment to meet the needs of the community," Lowry told the Reuters news service.

Again this year, the drive will be held on the second Saturday in May in over 10,000 cities and towns in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands and Guam. Last year, letter carriers collected a record 73.1 million pounds of food.

Donations will be collected by more than 1,300 local branches, with the assistance of rural carriers and other postal employees, as well as members of other unions and thousands of civic volunteers.

In New York City and Chicago, where transportation limitations preclude mailbox pickup, people are asked to take donations to their post office between May 4 and 9.

Executive Vice President Fred Rolando (standing) thanks the food drive co-sponsors during a coordinating session at NALC Headquarters. Leading the session is NALC Director of Public Relations Drew Von Bergen (c).





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More than 125 million postcards, sponsored by the Campbell Soup Company and the U.S. Postal Service's Priority Mail, will be mailed to postal customers to remind them of the drive.

### Adding star power

Joining the effort this year to promote the drive in public service announcements are one of Hollywood's best known couples—movie and television stars David Arquette and Courteney Cox (*see back cover*). In addition, the famed Harlem Globetrotters are helping out with a television PSA.

Valpak Direct Marketing Systems, a long-time strong supporter of the drive, again will feature food drive promotions on more than 40 million envelopes being delivered by the U.S. mail throughout the nation. New this year is the backing on a nationwide basis of Valassis Communications, which will tout the drive on 85 million of its mail-delivered Red Plum wraps.

Other co-sponsors of the drive with the NALC are Feeding America, the food bank network formerly known as America's Second Harvest; the United Way of America and its local United Ways; and the AFL-CIO.

National Rural Letter Carriers' Association President Don Cantriel gave the drive his strong endorsement in a recent issue of the NRLCA magazine. The NRLCA "actively supports the food drive and encourages its members to participate," he wrote.

He said that rural letter carriers, working shoulder-to-shoulder with city carriers, can play a pivotal role in the event's success. By working together, he noted, all letter carriers can reach every community, large and small, across the country.

"During these difficult economic times, the NALC Food Drive is more important than ever for food banks faced with dwindling supplies and

increased demand," Cantriel said. "Rural communities in particular have been hit with devastating job losses that make it more difficult for families to put food on the table."

According to Feeding America, some 35.5 million people, including 14 million American children, face hunger or are at risk of hunger every day.

### Postcard orders take off

As the *Postal Record* went to press, orders for more than 40 million Campbell Soup-Priority Mail postcards had been processed on the way to a final total expected to exceed 125 million cards—one of the largest mailings in the United States during the year.

Campbell Soup, the hallmark corporate supporter of the drive for more than a decade, has greatly boosted its effort to support the drive, which will be evident in the final weeks and days before the drive. This will include television and radio announcements, advertisements in numerous national magazines, and coupon fliers in Sunday newspapers just before the drive.

The distribution of plastic bags for use in the drive has expanded significantly with the help of some large food chains like Publix and Kroger. The addition of the plastic (or paper) bags has proven to be a major encouragement for citizens to donate, sometimes doubling or tripling the amount of food collected by a branch.

Last year's record 73.1 million pounds, the fifth consecutive year above 70 million, cemented the drive's distinction as the largest one-day food drive in the nation, and probably the world.

Questions about the 2009 NALC National Food Drive should be directed to Drew Von Bergen, NALC Director of Public Relations and food drive National Coordinator, at 202-662-2489 or by e-mail at [vonbergen@nalc.org](mailto:vonbergen@nalc.org). ✉



**National Rural Letter Carriers' Association President Don Cantriel encourages his union's members to pitch in and help collect food donations along their routes.**

### On the web

For the latest information regarding the food drive, including a list of branches registered for the 2009 drive, check the food drive section of NALC's website at [www.nalc.org/commun/fooddrive](http://www.nalc.org/commun/fooddrive).