

WSM and PORCH form food partnerships

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Even though the economy is rebounding in Orange County, local hunger remains an epidemic. According to USDA/Feeding America, one in six county residents is food insecure, meaning that they worry about having enough food to meet their basic needs each day.

Children are most vulnerable to food insecurity. An estimated 6,150 children receiving free meals in the Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools and Orange County Schools are hungry or worry about being hungry on weekends and holidays and during the long summer vacation.

To raise public awareness about the severity of local hunger and get healthy food into the hands of more low-income families in Orange County, Weaver Street Market will start a new initiative, Community Food Partnerships. During each quarter in 2015, Weaver Street Market will promote a different local hunger relief organization—PORCH, TABLE, Orange Congregations In Mission and Interfaith Council for Social Services—through store specials, cash donations cards, a display case, collections bins, marketing communications and various other methods.

During the first quarter, from Feb. 18th to March 3, Weaver Street Market will partner with the all-volunteer, grassroots, nonprofit organization PORCH—or People Offering Relief for Chapel Hill-Carrboro Homes. Through its monthly neighborhood food drives, PORCH collects non-perishable foods and cash donations that support these three programs:

Food for Families, which makes hand-to-hand, monthly deliveries of both fresh foods—fruits, vegetables, meat, eggs, milk—and non-perishable items to 260 families living in poverty in Chapel Hill and Carrboro. All of these families, which include 100 refugee families from Burma, have been identified by school social workers as being especially at risk of hunger.

Food for Pantries, which each month delivers many hundreds of bags of canned goods and other non-perishable items to nine local food pantries: Carolina Cupboard, Compass Center for Women and Families, Meals on Wheels of Chapel Hill and Carrboro, Orange Congregations In Mission, Orange County Department of Social Services—Chapel Hill and Hillsborough, Rogers Road Community Center, St. Joseph's CME Church and Triangle Church.

Food for Schools, which makes quarterly deliveries of healthy snack foods to each of the 19 public schools in Chapel Hill and Carrboro to stock school pantries, providing supplemental food to hungry students.

For the two-week period from Feb. 18 to March 3, Weaver Street Market shoppers can donate bags of natural and organic produce and eggs for the community food partner PORCH. WSM is selling the bags of groceries at half the retail value, and shoppers can donate a full, half or quarter bag. The

campaign goal is for shoppers to donate 1,000 bags of produce.

To encourage community members to volunteer for one of the community partners, Weaver Street Market is starting a Volunteer Rewards program. Each month, volunteers will qualify for a raffle for local prizes. Weaver Street Market owners and shoppers will be encouraged to volunteer at PORCH's monthly food sorts and assist with the delivery of non-perishable items to nine local pantries; volunteer for the packing and delivery of fresh foods to 260 local families in need; organize monthly food drives for PORCH in their own neighborhoods; become donors by leaving small food or cash donations on their porch each month; and join PORCH's social media campaign to raise public awareness about local hunger and food insecurity.

A key component of the public education campaign is reminding donors that hunger does not take a vacation. It is a monthly, sometimes weekly, occasionally daily challenge for hundreds of local families living in poverty. To make a dent in local hunger, food donations need to be marshaled on an ongoing, community-wide basis.

“Weaver Street Market's primary role in the Community Food Partnerships is to bring together community resources to achieve a greater impact on hunger relief than any group could achieve alone,” General Manager Ruffin Slater said.

For more information about PORCH, go to www.porchnc.org.

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