

## Donors coming from all walks of life

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STAMFORD -- With annual fundraising events and collections, nonprofit agencies work hard to meet the demands of Fairfield County's less fortunate.

But organizers say those of all socio-economic levels continue donating money and time, even when they're not doing so well themselves.

"It was interesting that people who earn \$15,000 are still giving to their church and schools," said Kathleen Bordelon, executive director of Senior Services in Stamford.

Bordelon said the group is about to hold its major annual fundraiser, a golf tournament at Sterling Farms Golf Course on May 23. Last year's event raised about \$50,000.

"This particular event appears to be on track," she said.

Senior Services also has an annual appeal in the fall, when letters are sent to the community asking for donations. It also has an endowment and pending grant applications.

"Certainly the requests for help have gone up," she said.

Bordelon said elderly clients need energy for the winter, prescription medication, assistance moving and more. Often, she said, they have to choose between health care and paying bills.

"We try to fill the gaps there, those spaces where people need the help," she said.

Senior Services is also looking for volunteers to work with clients. She said seniors are not "cute smiling faces," they are frail and sick, but getting to know them is rewarding.

"You just have to spend a few minutes to listen to peoples' stories," she said.

Catalina Horak, director of Neighbors Link in Stamford, said the organization two years ago successfully launched a community center that supports the immigration population. She said the organization survives fully on donations.

"The difference between us and other organizations is we started Neighbors Link in the middle of a recession," she said. "But we've been incredibly successful. Last year we raised \$478,000."

Of that total, Horak said \$388,000 was contributions and support from organization and donations, while the rest was donated goods and services.

"I think because people could really relate to our organization," Horak said. "There are a lot of immigrants in Fairfield County."

Horak said 37 percent of Stamford's population is foreign born, with the majority of their clients being Spanish-speaking. She said many residents have an immigrant working for them, so supporting their organization makes sense.

"People in this area are sophisticated and see themselves as social investors," she said.

Neighbors Link also has a major fundraiser this month, a May 1 breakfast at the Stamford Yacht Club. Horak said they expected to sell about 100 tickets, but have already sold 178.

Ceci Maher, director of Person-to-Person, an organization based in Darien providing emergency economic assistance to Fairfield County residents, said there seems to be a "slight easing" in the troubled economy.

"People have always been generous and we are seeing an increase in giving," she said. "It's not extreme, but there is an increase."

Maher says she's still seeing people who were hit hardest by the recession having a problem. Many have had their benefits run out.

"We have to raise \$3 million a year," she said. "We raise \$7.5 million in clothing and food."

Person-to-Person has a clothing center that gave out more than 50,000 bags of clothes last year, as well as food pantries in Darien and Norwalk that handed out food for 449,000 meals.

"The need for food in Norwalk is huge and we're really looking to increase that through food drives and engagement at the food pantry in Norwalk," she said.

Eight-eight percent of the food at the pantry in Darien is donated and the rest is purchased, Maher said. One school did a food drive and donated 400 bags of food, she said.

Person-to-Person, which also works with the food bank in Stamford, has 134 volunteers scheduled each week to run the clothing center and food pantries. Over the course of a year, Maher said they have about 2,500 volunteers.

Lucy Freeman, executive director at the Malta House in Norwalk, said since she started in November, people have been "very giving" with time and donations. She said they have a transitional living program for pregnant women or single mothers.

"We are pro-life and that's our main goal to make sure the baby comes into the world," she said.

The facility, located in an former convent at St. Thomas Church, serves 10 families. Each mother and child gets a room and shares a bathroom.

Along with financial donations, Freeman said they receive diapers, gift cards and other items. She said volunteers also work the reception desk, watch children, landscape and cook meals.

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