

“The Traveling Apprentice” Works for Chesapeake Church End Hunger

The Traveling Apprentice assignments have afforded me some great experiences over the past few months but none as humbling as working on the day before Thanksgiving at the End Hunger warehouse in Owings where I assisted in repacking hundreds of pounds of food that would, in turn, be redistributed to ten food pantries throughout Calvert.

Cathy Ring, Director of Operations, and Reverend Robert Hahn of Chesapeake Church welcomed me along with a number of volunteers and instructed us in what we were about to do. They pointed to over a hundred tall food collection boxes bearing the familiar End Hunger logo and explained that the boxes had been retrieved from strategically placed sites in over 50 participating businesses, churches, libraries, etc., throughout the county. Canned and boxed food items needed to be removed from the boxes, sorted by type--vegetables, fruit, pastas, soups, etc.- and placed in cut-off boxes by food category. Once a food-type-box was full it was to be moved to pallets to await pickup from a participating food pantry. As we worked, John Pappas arrived from one of the food pantries, Randle Cliffs, with his “shopping list” of items he needed to replenish the shelves of his pantry. Sorting and repacking must be addictive because John pitched in and sorted for nearly an hour before leaving with his treasures.

For hours I bent over to lift the food items from the boxes and walk the items to appropriate food-type stations arranged around the warehouse. Bend, lift, carry, walk. Bend, lift, carry, walk. It didn't take long to realize that anyone who did this a few days a week had no need of a fitness center membership. As we worked, Cathy and Robert explained that although Calvert is the sixth wealthiest county in the United States it also has a high foreclosure rate, that the poverty rate in Calvert rose to 4.8% last year, and that the food goes to Calvert residents caught in a quagmire known as “food insecurity,” a situation defined as “the state of, or risk of, being unable to provide food (to oneself, a family, a nation).” It's a state of not knowing where the next

meal will come from. It's a state that over 10,000 Calvert residents struggle with. It's a state where the working poor have to make daily choices about whether to make a utility or rent payment or put food on the table.

As I carried cans of what Cathy referred to as “protein” (beans and canned items such as chili and beef stews) I thought about the number of tables that would groan the next day under the weight of Thanksgiving abundance and I was saddened to realize that many Calvert families would be thankful to open a can I carried in my hand.

Working at End Hunger was an eye-opening and rewarding experience. Perhaps someday I'll have an opportunity to work at one of Calvert's food pantries and see firsthand how the generosity of Calvert residents can affect the lives of so many others.



The Traveling Apprentice is a monthly column written by Carolyn McHugh, President/CEO of the Calvert County Chamber of Commerce. Each month Carolyn spends a day working for a Chamber member, then writes a column for a local newspaper about the experience. The article is later inserted into Chamber's newsletter and posted on the Chamber's web-site in order to give the maximum exposure to the Chamber member. Her commitment to Chamber members and to the readers is that she's there for Chamber members and that whatever they do in their daily job, she'll do, too.