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COUNTY OF DELAWARE
GOVERNMENT CENTER BUILDING
201 W. FRONT STREET
MEDIA, PENNSYLVANIA

610-891-4931
FAX NUMBER 610-891-8055
E-MAIL: delcopr@co.delaware.pa.us

Department of Public Relations
William A. Lovejoy, Jr.
Director

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Contact: Trish Coffell
Communications Officer
610-891-4943

County Kicks Off Annual Thanksgiving Food Drive As Tough Economy Creates Greater Need for Donations

Delaware County Council and the County Department of Human Services, Office of Behavioral Health (OBH), will once again join forces with Magellan Behavioral Health of PA to collect non-perishable food items to distribute to families in need this Thanksgiving season. Providers involved with food assistance programs report a dire need for donations during the current economic downturn.

Members of the public are invited to join county employees in placing donations in collection boxes, which are placed in the Government Center lobby, outside the Sheriff's office in the Courthouse, the Fronfield Building, which houses court services, the County Office of Services for the Aging (COSA) in Eddystone and the Children and Youth Services (CYS) office in Chester.

Additional boxes will be placed at the County Office of Human Services in Upper Darby.

Delaware County Council and OBH have partnered with Magellan for eight years to coordinate the food drive. In 2009, the Thanksgiving Food Drive resulted in the distribution of just over 10,000 pounds of food, which was dispersed to needy families for holiday meals.

After last year's record donation, this year's goal will be to collect and distribute 11,000 pounds of food. People are invited to donate cans and boxes of non-perishable food in designated boxes at any of the county government locations.

In addition, Bill Chambers of OBH and Julie Brown of Magellan continue their traditional wager, which states that whoever collects the lesser amount of food must deliver their collected items wearing a large, colorful turkey costume.

County Councilman Thomas McGarrigle announced the start of the 2010 Food Drive on Oct. 5 and expressed confidence that the generosity of County and Magellan employees will result in a successful food drive.

"The need is greater now than ever. During these difficult economic times, it is crucial that we reach out to the needy families in Delaware County," Councilman McGarrigle said. "While most families

are dealing with stricter budgets right now, we all need to extend a helping hand to those who are not as fortunate.”

Ruby Benson, president of the DelCo Interfaith Food Assistance Network (DIFAN), said that the number of families seeking food assistance continues to climb in this weak economy.

“This has been a difficult year for many families. The economy has forced significantly more families, who have never needed our type of services, to ask for help now,” said Benson. “DIFAN has experienced a 25-30 percent growth in clients seeking food this past year. Some of the individuals are homeless and we have to pack them special boxes.”

A 2009 survey by the Philadelphia Health Management Corp. indicated that 6.2 percent of county adults have reduced the size of meals they eat to save money, and 5.6 percent have skipped meals.

Delaware County Council, OBH and Magellan sponsor the 2010 Food Drive, in conjunction with Family and Community Service in Media and the agency’s DelCo Interfaith Food Assistance Network (DIFAN). The Food Drive will run through Nov. 19. Food items will be distributed through DIFAN to food banks in Broomall, Chester, Collingdale, Media, Sharon Hill and Upper Darby.

Suggested items for donation include canned meats (chicken, tuna, chicken and dumplings), boxes or canned side dishes, peanut butter, jelly, unsweetened cereal, infant formula, coffee, tea, canned tomatoes or sauce and canned fruits and soups, especially main dish soups with meat. Any non-perishable foods are appreciated.

Individuals who want to make donations, or families who want information about the Food Assistance Network can call Family and Community Service, (610) 566-7540. For information about the Delaware County Food Drive, contact OBH at (610) 713-2365.



Attending the Tuesday, Oct.5, County Council meeting to launch the 2010 Food Drive are:

- Jonna DiStefano, OBH, Administrator
- Gayle Oddi, OBH, Administrative Assistant
- Daniel Fagan, OBH, Support Staff
- Jeanne Scarborough, OBH, Childrens MH Specialist
- Bill Chambers, OBH, MH Program Director
- Mary Ellen Cavanagh, Family and Community Service of Delaware County, administrative assistant
- Julie Brown, Magellan, Delaware County Project Director
- Ruby Benson, President of DIFAN