

The Need

The area northwest of Tucson along the Santa Cruz River has always had its roots in agriculture (pun intended). The fertile soils lend themselves well to the growing of hay, cotton and wheat which is still a major industry. The town incorporated in 1977 and by that time there was already a food bank of sorts. Having recognized the needs of the migrant farm workers, the good people of Marana regularly brought food to the parsonage where it was distributed out the back door to those in need. In 1990 the town had a population of just under 2,200 people but already a 2,700 square foot metal warehouse had been attached to the parsonage and the food bank had come under the umbrella of the Tucson Community Food Bank (now known as the Community Food Bank of Southern Arizona). We operate today out of that very same cinderblock house and attached metal warehouse.

As the community has grown in size to 122 square miles and a population of 45,000 people, so has the food bank grown. Nearly 2,800 families visit monthly to receive government commodities and nearly a million pounds per year of donated food. The primary commercial donors of food are the 11 area grocery stores who daily offer food which is no longer marketable. As you can imagine, few shoppers are taking the milk with today's sell by date on the carton. However, the milk is still tasty and safe to consume for weeks to come. We give the food to families who are in great need and otherwise unable to shop for this type of fresh food. The food bank is greatly dependent upon food donated by those who participate in food drives. Although the grocery stores are generous, it is very difficult to predict what foods will be received. Food drives typically focus on most needed items like peanut butter and cereal. Can you imagine your kitchen without flour, jam, cake mix or many of the things most of us consider to be staples. Without a food drive, the food bank would not be able to offer these items many of us routinely enjoy. The food drive at the Highlands demonstrate the best in food drive giving. More than 2,00 pounds is routine each month during the season. The Marana Community Food Bank and the families we serve are appreciative of the "bonus" these donations provide.

Linda Hampton, Executive Director
Community Food Bank – Marana
(520) 310-4662

A Community Solution

Approximately nine years ago The Highlands at Dove Mountain began a monthly Food Drive to benefit the Marana Food Bank. It has evolved into a mutually beneficial and successful arrangement for both entities. I would like to share how it is done with you other communities along the Dove Mountain corridor in hopes that someone in each area would be inspired to start such a venture in their home development.

As you can see from the previous article from Linda Hampton, Executive Director of the Marana Food Bank, the need is real and all help is most certainly appreciated. The leader of the effort in your home area would first set a pickup day per month, then divide the community into reasonable routes, advertise for those willing to be collectors on a monthly basis and finally contact the Marana Food Bank that you would like to have totes delivered to a selected home on a certain day and picked up on a certain day. If you have a monthly HOA newsletter it is wise to put a notice with the pickup date in that publication each month. The only other thing to do is have reminder signs made to put out about a week ahead at each entrance to your subdivision coming and going. The signs are then collected following the day's pickup and reused each month thereafter. FAST SIGNS on Roger Road does a great job.

The Highlands has selected one Sunday a month and asks that each home set out a can or more at the end of their driveway by 9am on collection day. The collectors go out about 9:15, travel their route, picking up the donations and dropping them off at the selected home. That is it!!! The Highlands is a community of approximately 1300 homes and fills 3-4 totes per month. It is easy to organize, it doesn't take the collectors more than 1/2 hour or less to complete their task and everyone feels so fulfilled in what they have done for those in need.

Should you have any questions or a desire a further explanation, please email Barb Thelen, bthelen999@yahoo.com, include your name and phone number & you will be contacted. Thank you for considering this simple and worthy project.

