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## East County food banks are feeling the economic pinch

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For the Contra Costa Times

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With the downturn in the economy and more people out of work, local nonprofit organizations, church groups and food banks are worried that there will not be enough to go around during the holiday season. Many local groups have already been feeling the pinch as donations have been down and more people are looking to them to help with food needs.

Capt. Jackie Smith from the Antioch Branch of the Salvation Army says that most people think about donating canned food and other items during the holidays, but lack of food is a year-round problem.

"Already this fall we are over 40 percent ahead of our usual service to the community," Smith said.

Becoming worried about what this would mean for the holidays and the year ahead, Smith and a group called Safe-Based Subcommittee to the Child Welfare Redesign alerted Federal Glover and the Board of Supervisors to their concerns. Safe-Based suggested declaring October as "Faith Feeding Families" Month, which the Board of Supervisors did at their Sept. 22 meeting.

"We wanted to request that people be alerted to the problem," Smith said.

Safe-Based will host a Pastors' Luncheon on Oct. 22 in the hopes of raising awareness of the problem.

The group would also like to take it a step further by opening an additional East County food pantry after the holidays where local church and religious organizations would donate all the food.

"We're hoping that the church community, or faith-based, will help," she said.

Smith explained that churches are among the first place that people go for help, but they lack adequate publicity and ample donations to supply all of those in need. She is hoping that through this new pantry more people's needs can be met.

While the Salvation Army is best known for helping those in need, there are many other groups in East County who are working toward the same goal. The Antioch Food Closet has been around since 1969. It is located in St. Andrew's Lutheran Church, although it has no affiliation to the church.

The Antioch Food Closet offers a three-day emergency supply of food for a family of four. According to organizer Susan Clark, the program only allows families to come in once every three months for supplies. They can generally handle eight families a day. That comes to about 100 separate families a month. Clark says that she rarely sees the same families twice.

The group purchases food from the Contra Costa and Solano County Food Bank at a reduced fee. It also receives monetary donations from various sources, but Clark said she noticed a distinct reduction over the past several months.

"The main problem is that people just don't have the money to give," Clark said.

One of the resources for the group is a cash donation box at one of the local chain grocery stores. Each month the store managers add all the

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money collected from the box and put it an account so that Clark can go in and buy food, at the regular cost. Last February she found that the account was overdrawn by \$2,000.

"I had no idea where we were going to get that kind of money," she said. "We had to wait months for the account to be repaid by donations so we could shop at the store again."

Clark said these types of programs work well when the economy is in good shape, but right now it is leaving a large hole that will need to be filled by other sources.

One of the ways these organizations fill the gap is with fundraisers. Over the next couple of months many of the groups will be hosting events that they hope will supplement their food donations.

The Brentwood Regional Community Chest helps approximately 500 residents each Christmas from Brentwood, Oakley, Discovery Bay, Knightsen and Bethel Island with food and toys. Last year a group called the Friends of Oakley took over helping the Chest's Oakley residents. By taking 125 Oakley families off the hands of the Community Chest, it allowed the Community Chest to add another 125 non-Oakley residents to its list.

Now in their second year of organizing the holiday food drive, the Friends of Oakley is putting together its first fundraiser for the event. On Oct. 10 it will host a Wine, Cheese and Children's Art Show at the Hanoum Estates in Oakley. With the \$20 advanced or \$25 at-the-door ticket, the groups hopes to raise the number of residents it helps from 125 to 250 this Christmas.

The Brentwood Regional Community Chest plans to kick off its fundraising with the help of the Bryon Delta Lions Club food drive in mid-October and with

asking for donations at grocery stores starting in November.

"I believe there will be a really big need in the community this year." said Lillian Pierce of the Brentwood Regional Community Chest. "There are a lot of good organized groups out there to help."

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