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SELF SERVICE

Noblesville couple's food pantry system keeps growing

By Mark Ambrogi
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Mark Hall remembers what it was like living paycheck to paycheck.

Hall said he and his wife, Lisa, never had to go to a food pantry but there were times at the end of the week they would eat canned food.

"We weren't on public assistance," said Hall, who has three grown daughters. "Lisa was working, and I was working, but back in the early 1990s, there were a few weeks when you'd get to Wednesday and there is no money for food. So, dinner was Dinty Moore Beef Stew and a baked potato. If we were in that spot, there has to be a lot of others in that spot."

So, 11 years ago, they started performing food charity work. It is the corporate charity of the couple's businesses, TalentLogistiX, Pinpoint Resources and TechTrades. The Halls had supported Shepherd Community Center in inner-city Indianapolis for 10 years. Hall said they realized they needed to do something in Hamilton County. They have lived in Noblesville for more than 30 years.

Hall learned of a program the Nazarene Church conducts in Louisville of offering free outdoor food pantries based on the honor system.

"So, we completely ripped off the idea and we hope added to it," said Hall, who decided to launch FeedingTeam.org.

Three new pantries, including one at International Association of Fire Fighters Local 4416, 399 South 14th St., Noblesville, were launched Dec. 11 under the FeedingTeam.org banner, bringing the total to 12. The other two new pantries are at Laura Hayden's School of Dance and Indiana Academy in Cicero. Hall said they could have nearly 20 by this summer of 2021.

Hall, 60, had the idea to start the program in the fall of 2019.

"We had six ready to go and thought we were going to be done," Hall said. "Then COVID hit, and we had to rush them out. We had no food except for 56 cases of Gatorade and 60 to 70 cases of popcorn. That's all we had at the time."

Four volunteer families help stock the



Mark and Lisa Hall pause in front of a truck full of food pantry items. (Submitted photos)

pantries.

Hall said high school students taking classes at Ivy Tech built the pantries and Gaylor Electric painted them. The pantries are open 24 hours a day. They are large enough to hold several hundred meals with a plexiglass front so people can see if there is food inside.

"Our business takes a piece of every sale and we go buy nonperishable food items and put in the pantries every Friday," Hall said. "The locations are designed to match places where residents are right at or just above the poverty level. They are not designed for indigent or homeless, although many indigent or homeless use them. They are working folks who just get to Wednesday and they run out of money until they get paid on Friday. It's designed to have families get by for two, three, four, five, six meals until they get the next paycheck."

Hall said anyone in need can use the pantries.



Mark and Lisa Hall pause in front of one of their outdoor food pantries.

"If you say you're hungry and you said you need food, our goal is to have food in all 12 pantries, 24/7, 365 (days a year)," Hall said. "The premise is on every pantry, 'Take what you need, give what you can.'"

For more, visit feedingteam.org.

FAMILY AFFAIR

Lisa Hall regards families using the support of the food pantries as teaching moments.

"Teaching children the importance of charity, specifically supporting their neighbors, is one of the most rewarding parts of what we do," Lisa said. "Watching parents together with their children stocking food that they donate in the pantries warms my heart."

Two of the couple's daughters, Amber Hall and Alyssa Thomas, both Noblesville residents, help with the program.

"Amber is instrumental in organizing the annual fundraiser, recruiting volunteers and managing our social media campaigns," Mark Hall said. "Alyssa organizes, sorts and stocks pantries."

Amber graduated from Noblesville High School in 2001 and Ashley, who lives in Williamsport, graduated from NHS in 2004. Alyssa graduated from Heritage Christian in 2008.