

Give and take

Outdoor food pantry seeks to bridge need gap

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“It’s Wednesday. My check doesn’t come ’til Friday. What do I do?”

That’s the question Kelly Smeltzer and West Walnut Church of Christ sought to answer.

The result is the installation of a FeedingTeam.org outdoor food pantry intended to help residents bridge the gap when resources are gone but the next paycheck is a day or two away.

Smeltzer, the former Jay County High School band director who retired in June, remembers seeing a Facebook post about something called a Blessings Box. He didn’t think too much about it at the time, but later learned from his brother-in-law Phil Moore about a new initiative started in his home county. FeedingTeam.org even had a box set up at his home church, Arcadia Church of the Brethren.



This FeedingTeam.org outdoor food pantry was installed last month on the north side of West Walnut Church of Christ in Portland. It is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week for those in need to take a few items to help them get by. Anyone can donate to the food pantry by simply placing non-perishable items in the box. (The Commercial Review/Ray Cooney)

Mark and Lisa Hall of Hamilton County started the organization in order to help because they recalled being food insecure when they were a young married couple with kids. “Our mission is to provide food for our hungry neighbors with an emphasis on serving families that don’t fit the models of public assistance and traditional food pantries,” its website says.

It’s a mission that spoke to Smeltzer.

“I just felt called to do this,” he said.

“I thought it was a way to serve a need for others,” he added. “To me, I thought it was fairly easy to maintain. But I thought it would be good to do. ... If it serves this community a little bit, then that’s great.”

So Smeltzer, president of West Walnut’s board, brought the idea to his fellow board members and they got behind it. FeedingTeam.org provided the outdoor food pantry free of charge and the church gave \$100 in seed money to help fill it. It was installed last month.

Despite that initial donation, Smeltzer said his challenge to his fellow congregants was to think about what is in their cabinets that they may not need or use.

“Throw it in your car,” he said. “The next time you drive by the church, put it in the cabinet. ...

“It might be a help and benefit to many others who really can use that food more than we could.”

“The whole concept behind it is ‘Take what you need, give what you can,’” he added, quoting the phrase that is printed on the top of the outdoor food pantry. “Rely on the community.”

The dandelion yellow food pantry — it is located in the alley north of West Walnut Church of Christ, 204 W. Walnut St., Portland — is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week and is available to anyone in need. Those who use it are asked to limit themselves to six items per visit in order to make sure there is enough for others.

Those who are able to donate can do so by simply stopping by and putting their items in the box. Suggested items include non-perishable foods such as canned soups, fruits and vegetables, peanut butter, jelly, condiments and crackers. Toiletries and personal hygiene products are also welcome.

“It’s open, out there, 24/7,” said Smeltzer. “It’s just come up any time you want. Take something. If you can, leave a can of something.”

“That’s what I like about it. It’s not a me, it’s not an us, it’s everybody. To be able to give to others is a pretty good feeling.”