

FAIRFIELD

Food pantry's work a community effort

By Richard O Jones
Staff Writer

FAIRFIELD — Although the Fairfield Food Pantry has received a lot of assistance from area churches in its 21 years, it is truly a community effort to get emergency food to the people in the Fairfield City School District who need it.

And like many pantries and soup kitchens, the Fairfield Food Pantry relies on a group of core volunteers to keep the food flowing. In October, the pantry handled some 16,000 pounds of food, according to director Wayne Patten, much of it coming from Shared Harvest Foodbank's government and food rescue programs.

When Toby Ruben was getting ready to retire from Great American Insurance, where she ended her 38-year career as an underwriter five years ago, she was on the lookout to find something to help fill the time, something that she could feel good about, and it came down to a food pantry or some kind of animal rescue.

"Working in a pantry is safer for me than working with pets because then I would bring them home,"

Ruben said. "So here, I could help them while I'm here, and I could walk away and not feel like I need to take all these people home with me and feed them. But I feel satisfaction, is what I feel. I feel satisfaction in helping them."

This satisfaction, she said, is what keeps her coming back, and said she feels genuinely touched and a bit surprised at the gratitude of the people she serves.

"I feel a satisfaction in knowing I'm helping a person and they feel good, and they always thank you," she said. "I find that very unusual that they thank us for being here, for helping them. There are so many people that are in need. I'm glad we're here to do that."

Ruben, a native of Brooklyn said that she is happy to repay the kindness she felt from the people she worked with in coming to an area where there are not a lot of Jewish people and still was made to feel at home.

"Working with a lot of diverse people, we accepted each other in what you believed in, and how you felt, your feelings," she said. "They were just very kind in accepting me, and my reli-



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gion, and my idiosyncrasies, and my beliefs."

The key to benefiting from kindness, she said, is to show kindness.

"I think it starts with children at home, then the respect for an elder person is not the same as it used to be years ago," she said. "Today, the loss of respect has a lot to do with it, so if you lose respect, you're not into kindness because you don't know how to show it."

Her fellow volunteer Patrice Schwettman said that children are her favorite role models for showing kindness.

"I see it a lot because my

granddaughter is a Down Syndrome child. My daughter belongs to the Down Syndrome Association, and they have their walks every year, but you see all of the people that turned out to support these children."

Because everyone has difficult times to endure, Schwettman said that doing little favors, even just giving a smile or a friendly greeting, can help brighten a person's day.

That kind of kindness is in short supply these days, according to volunteer Linda Wittman.

"Kindness is important because it's such a fast-paced world, and people don't take the time," she said. "They just are too busy, and they don't take the time to help out their neighbors or friends or people in need. And so we do need more people to step back and do that."

But even if a person doesn't have the spare time to volunteer at a food pantry, there are still opportunities to exhibit kindness and support organizations such as Fairfield Food Pantry by giving to the Journal-News/Shared Harvest Community Food Relief drive that is currently underway.