

Pantry inaugurated at LMC

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Gratitude was the tone surrounding the Food Pantry ribbon cutting ceremony Wednesday, March 8. Reflecting how the pantry came to be and thanking those who made it possible — the Contra Costa and Solano County Food Bank, faculty, staff and students — Los Medanos College and local community members came to show their support toward the new resource provided on campus that helps students who face food insecurity.

“We are officially open, fully stocked, with student employees working and ready to provide warm smiles and their service to students here at Los Medanos College,” said LMCAS Adviser John Nguyen in his opening speech.

While expressing his excitement about the ceremony, he added many have used the pantry’s services in the three weeks it has been open. According to Nguyen, over 60 students have come to pick up food. Six hundred food items in total have been given.

“Our student life office is one of a kind. They do an incredible job and it’s all about student support,” professed LMC President Bob Kratochvil during his speech. “That’s the beauty of this college. When there’s a need identified, the whole community comes to help and it’s really a crazy and wonderful acknowledgement of just the love and affection that you have for the work that you do and for the seriousness that you take in providing student support, every single one of you so thank you very much.” He additionally provided background information on the number of students who attend community colleges across the country who have significant food insecurity.

“If you see the statistics on how many students actually need food it’s really astounding. 20 percent nationally of our students in community colleges have some sort of need for food,” said Kratochvil adding his appreciation to those who made the pantry happen. “So to take it upon yourselves ... I really, really commend you and thank you very much from all of us at LMC of working on behalf of our students.” Nguyen explained that if it were not for students like Tito Ramos — a United States veteran and LMC alum who brought the idea to have a student pantry to student life —and financial contributions from those around campus and the community, the pantry would not be what it is today.

“The idea first came to me when I was doing a concurrent enrollment program at UC Berkeley, I just happened to stumble upon it because the people who were helping me over there in that program, happened

to be in the same building and I saw this room filled with food and I asked what is going on,” said Ramos while giving the audience a brief history to how he came to approach LMC student life.

He explained that he was told the room was the university’s Food Pantry and began to use their services, came back to LMC and talked to student ambassadors and coordinators about his personal struggle and why the campus needed a food pantry.

“It was embarrassing to me the first time I went to student life and told them what I was going through,” said Ramos. “And the reason why it really affected me was because the first time, I dropped out of school — I couldn’t afford it. Giving your kids hotdogs for breakfast, lunch and diner is not the nutritious thing to do and you kind of look at yourself a little different so I was like no school isn’t worth it and so I was working and it took about two years for me to get back up on my feet and say ‘ok I’m ready for school again, I’m not going to stop,’”

Additionally, Ramos acknowledged the importance of having the pantry because of knowing his own personal struggle, realizing someone else might be going through the same thing too.

“It can be a juggling act trying to balance your school and your home life, do I eat today? Do I pay for books? So having this resource here is an amazing thing and it can help provide some well needed relief so that we can continue to be successful in our academic journeys.”

Together, he and members of student life sent out emails seeking support and explaining the need of the food pantry to LMC employees. One faculty member showed support being English instructor Scott Warfe, who worked with TOMS to get a \$10,000 grant for the pantry.

Warfe echoed similar sentiments in regards to recognizing student need on campus. During one of his 8 a.m. classes, he set out granola bars for students to take out of guilt for assigning an in-class essay as early as he did. One of his students approached him asking for more than one granola bar and thanking him for letting her do so because it was the only thing she would be eating for the day — the moment making him aware of the need of additional support for LMC students.

“I knew a lot about this student,” said Warfe. “This student had to take two busses to get to LMC in the morning and two busses to get home in the evening and she did this every day, while probably having only eaten two granola bars that her English teacher brought because, he felt guilty about assigning an in-class essay at 8 in the morning.”

He, with the help of others, created a small little food closet in the English department area for who faced similar struggles as the one in his class. It was not until Student Life Ambassador Sarah Holderman informed about the food pantry, introduced him to Ramos and heard his story.

“I shared [the students stories] with my brother in law who works over at TOMS and he told me about their community fund where TOMS gives 10 thousand dollar grants every month,” explained Warfe adding that over the course of four months, he continuously worked to get said grant from the company to fund the food pantry. “I think it’s a good lesson that we’re not here to collect stories and I don’t think we’re even really here to change stories — though we might help students change their own story — but what we can do is when we share them, we might be giving them a voice that they wouldn’t otherwise have.”