

Monthly food giveaway for hundreds in Vallejo

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Volunteers fill nearly 350 bags of food for the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano's monthly food giveaway in the parking lot of the North Vallejo Community Center on Saturday. The food bank shows up rain or shine every third Saturday (Rachel Raskin-Zrihen — Times-Herald)

Pat Brown of Vallejo said she and her family would likely have to “do without,” if the Food Bank of Contra Costa & Solano didn’t hold its monthly Food Assistance Program at the North Vallejo Community Center.

With three in her intimate family “and grandkids in and out,” all the time, the food giveaway is a godsend, she said. Brown made her way on foot, laden with a paper and a plastic bag stuffed with various food items.

Since 2009, the food bank has been delivering bags of food for more than 300 people from 10 a.m. to noon, every third Saturday of the month, program coordinator Julie Redmond said.

“This is the USDA government program, open to the public based on income levels,” Redmond said.

There’s a chart taped to the sign-in table in front of the North Vallejo Community Center, showing the maximum income households of various sizes can earn to qualify, though proof is not required as this is “on the honor system,” she said.

“People thank us all the time,” Redmond said. “They say things like, ‘we don’t know what we’d do without you.’”

The monthly food giveaway happens rain or shine, she said.

“Only some serious catastrophe would keep us from showing up to our sites,” she said.

Partnering with various agencies, the Food Bank volunteers pre-fill bags with basic staples, like canned goods, dried goods like rice, pasta and beans, cereal, and the like, Redmond said. There were also plastic bags of fruit, and this time, frozen catfish fillets — an unusual treat, she said.

“It’s a lot of fun,” Redmond said. “There are lots of volunteers, since we’re here on Saturdays, and without them, I don’t know what we’d do. They’re gold to us.”

Saturday was Irma Lopez’s first time taking advantage of the opportunity to supplement her pantry, to help feed her family of four, she said.

“It’s good to have this for the community,” she said. “I’m not working now. I’m on disability, and we’d be hungry without this.”