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Glen Ellyn Food Pantry set to move and expand thanks to community's help



Molly Moore and Kim Wiebe prepare grocery bundles for pickup at the Glen Ellyn Food Pantry. (Courtesy of Glen Ellyn Food Pantry)



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The leadership of the Glen Ellyn Food Pantry is grateful that so many stepped up in "a year like no other" due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We just received an outpouring of support," said Paula Nugent, president of the Glen Ellyn Food Pantry's board of directors. "Not only for our capital campaign, but also for operations to make sure that we could feed the people coming to our door."

It's a transformational time for the Glen Ellyn Food Pantry, a nonprofit that was founded in 1979 at Grace Lutheran Church.

Last month, it met a \$900,000 fundraising goal to renovate and relocate to a former parsonage next to Faith Lutheran Church on Park Boulevard. Construction is expected to begin in May.

"It's an incredible group effort to make this happen," said Nugent, eager for the food pantry to expand by having its own dedicated space.



During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Glen Ellyn Food Pantry started working with Exodus World Services to provide grocery care packs for about 120 refugee families each month. - Courtesy of Glen Ellyn Food Pantry

With typical in-person fundraisers out of the question, Nugent said the Glen Ellyn Food Pantry found creative and socially distant workarounds. These included a drive-in jazz concert, a virtual wine and cheese gathering and an online telethon featuring local talent.

Nugent also credits a \$50,000 matching grant from the JCS Arts, Health and Education Fund of the DuPage Foundation. That ultimately helped the food pantry to get over the last hurdle of raising the final \$100,000.

COVID-19 also posed enormous challenges to the food pantry's staff and roster of 300 volunteers. Being adaptable was key when health and safety guidelines were in constant flux.

With in-person shopping initially out of the question, the staff developed a phone-shopping system for clients to choose what they needed.

The Glen Ellyn Food Pantry also had to scramble when its main provider, the Geneva-based Northern Illinois Food Bank, had to shut down twice due to coronavirus outbreaks. Both times were right before the Glen Ellyn Food Pantry's delivery days.

"We literally had empty shelves," said Nugent, adding that urgent and successful calls were put out to various community groups to help get the groceries they needed.



Marcy Farrell, left, Janet Bratt and Lisa Tylke prepare grocery bundles for pickup at the Glen Ellyn Food Pantry. - Courtesy of Glen Ellyn Food Pantry

During 2020, the food bank's roster of clients swelled by an extra 800 to nearly 5,500 individuals, including more than 2,000 children. The food pantry also added Villa Park to its list of 11 DuPage County communities that it already serves. It also started a partnership with Exodus World Services, which aids refugees.

Nugent was also excited to share that the Glen Ellyn Food Pantry is one of five nominees for nonprofit organization of the year. The Glen Ellyn Chamber of Commerce is expected to announce its winners for the 57th Glen Ellyn Community Awards in late April or early May.

But win or lose, the Glen Ellyn Food Pantry is unquestionably prized by its clients in need.

"No one comes here because they want to. They come because they need to," Nugent said. "We did not once have to cease operations in 2020, which was again due to the incredible support from the community."

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