

Unitarian Church Starts Food Rescue Program For Those In Need

(Inquirer and Mirror, July 14, 2016 – this is an edited copy of the original article)

By Lindsay Pykosz

lpykosz@inkym.com

Over the span of two weeks, Gary Langley picked up tubs packed with roughly 500 pounds of pre-packaged sandwiches and salads, blueberries, strawberries, bananas and avocados from just two different food-centric businesses. The food he collected all went toward the Food Rescue Nantucket program, an initiative of the Seventh Principle Project of the Unitarian Universalist Meeting House. “We do this in partnership with the (Nantucket) Food Pantry to create programs to capture edible food before it becomes waste,” said Langley, chairman of the Food Rescue Nantucket Committee. “This is food that otherwise would be thrown out.” Currently in its pilot stage, Langley has been collecting food from two locations: Bartlett’s Ocean View Farm and the Nantucket Culinary Center and Corner Table Café. The food is then redistributed to the Nantucket Food Pantry and others in need on the island. “We redistribute it through the Food Pantry and other nonprofits on the island, such as Our Island Home . . . and The Homestead,” said Langley, who is married to Rev. Linda Simmons, the minister at the island’s Unitarian Church. Langley also started the Seventh Principle Project, which ties into the church’s principle of “Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.” “It started out to supply people in need at the Food Pantry. The problem is, we have more than they can take.” Langley and other volunteers will go to the two businesses on Tuesdays and Thursdays about an hour before they open to collect leftover food that includes pre-packaged sandwiches and salads, strawberries, blueberries, bananas, avocados and other items that are packaged and labeled and bring it to the Food Pantry. “If we had a party the night before and had a gorgeous vegetable crudité, we can dump it right into the bin,” said Joy Margolis, the proprietor of the Nantucket Culinary Center and Corner Table Café along with her husband Greg. Food that is not pre-packaged, like that collected at the Culinary Center from cooking events and classes, cannot be donated to the Food Pantry. In that case, it is delivered to the other locations like Our Island Home.

The United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization estimates that one-third of the world’s food production goes to waste each year. They estimate that if North America and Europe eliminated their food waste, it would feed the world’s hungry three times over every year. On Nantucket, Langley knows that he has only started to scratch the surface, and eliminating all food waste would be the best-case scenario. But he admits he has a long way to go, and eventually would like to work with island restaurants and caterers to get more people involved. “We’re having these pilot programs with the Culinary Center and Bartlett’s Farm because we don’t want to get ahead of ourselves,” Langley said. “We want to make sure it’s running right, that we have some volunteers in place, so we’re taking it slow. What we don’t want is to overcommit and have someone call and we can’t pick up.”

Anne Marie Bellavance, a member of the Food Rescue Nantucket board and executive director of the Nantucket Food Pantry, said the idea of food rescue is something that has only recently started taking off. In 2013, the Nantucket Project had Ashley Stanley, the founder and executive director of Lovin’ Spoonfuls as one of its fellows. Her program, based in Boston, Mass., rescues and distributes healthy, fresh food that would otherwise be thrown away. “We pick up wholesome, fresh food that would otherwise be thrown away from grocery stores, produce wholesalers, farms and farmers markets, and distribute it to community non-profits that feed Greater Boston’s hungry,” reads the website. “Many people don’t think of sandwiches or salads or prepared foods. So as long as they’re boxed, we can take them,” said Bellavance, whose organization averages about 150 visitors a week, with 75-90 people during each two hour period that the Food Pantry is open on Tuesdays and Thursdays. “As long as it is labeled, that is something absolutely new that we haven’t received before. This year is the first we’re starting to put that on our shelves. Soups and salads and sandwiches that are packaged already and labeled with ingredients is something that the clients are excited for. With the housing conditions and many people not having access to a kitchen, having anything that’s already prepared is exciting.” The Food Pantry is currently in its busiest part of the season, with the number of clients trending upward with the island’s influx of people during the summer months. On Tuesdays and Thursdays between 4-6 p.m., clients come to 10 Washington St. with a checklist of items that volunteers pack into bags. “From that hour between 4-5 p.m., we’re usually helping 50-plus people,” Bellavance said. “Some people will see each other and catch up, which is also an important element.”

The Food Rescue Nantucket Committee meets twice a month on Thursdays at 11 a.m. at the Unitarian Church, 11 Orange St. To join the team or for those who are interested in becoming a volunteer, contact Gary Langley at (508) 221-8282 or gary@blinddogphoto.com.