

# Youth play big role at CORA Food Pantry

By Don DeVore

The second grade girl, a whisper in a yellow dress, marched through the food pantry door last July and placed a brown grocery bag on the floor.

"There," she announced, eyes shining. "Some food for kids who really need it."

The CORA Food Pantry in Pittsboro could not get along without young people like the girl in the yellow dress. She and classmates throughout Chatham County bring thousands of pounds of food every year through the CORA door, their eyes alive with the pleasure of giving.

CORA stands for Chatham Outreach Alliance. It is Chatham County's largest pantry, and this year it has needed every can of green beans and tin of salmon its supporters, young and old, can find. Job losses and inflation have raised the need for emergency assistance this year to record levels. In June alone CORA served nearly 400 families. By late summer CORA was continuing to provide emergency food to between 250 and 300 Chatham County families a month, the most in its 20-year history.

"It is a trying time for many people," says Marci Whittaker, executive director of the pantry. "We are so blessed that children and teenagers are among our most ardent supporters. They help organize their own food drives at schools and churches, and march with pride in our annual Chatham Hunger Walk."

That Walk is CORA's largest fundraising event of the year, and it takes place on Sunday, Nov. 2, through



When Galen Kirkpatrick turned 13 and celebrated his bar mitzvah earlier this year, the table centerpiece for the celebration consisted of canned and packaged food to be donated to food pantries. Galen, who attends Smith Middle School, Chapel Hill, wanted to help the hungry. Bar mitzvah is a ceremony marking the time when a Jewish boy attains the age of religious duty and responsibility.

the streets of Pittsboro. The three- and six-mile walks start at 2:30 p.m. at Pittsboro Elementary School. Pre-event activities and registration begin at 1 p.m. The walk is a countywide event. The location alternates between Pittsboro and Goldston.

Supporting the hunger walk is easy. Go to [ChathamHungerWalk@embarqmail.com](mailto:ChathamHungerWalk@embarqmail.com) or call 545.3030 for information on taking part. You can walk solo, join a team, sponsor a walker, or even organize your own team.

This year CORA has added an exciting new component to the Hunger Walk - On-line giving. Walk supporters can go to the Web site: [www.firstgiving.com/CORA](http://www.firstgiving.com/CORA). There they can make a donation, create a walking team or join an existing one.

CORA was founded by a group of Chatham County churches two

decades ago to provide emergency assistance to people in need. Through the years CORA has stayed close to its roots by devoting at least 85 percent of donated funds strictly for food purchases and distribution. A small army of volunteers works five days a week picking up food, stocking shelves and serving clients.

CORA's mission is to provide emergency aid, not permanent assistance. A qualifying individual or family is entitled to receive a week's worth of groceries up to four times a year. Each week's allotment is selected to provide nutritionally balanced meals for each member of a family.

This year's surge of requests for help is unprecedented, Whittaker said, and has created special urgency in the quest for support. In the 12 months ending June 30, CORA handled more than 2,900 Chatham County family visits representing more than 10,000 individuals. Nearly half of these family members were children. These 2,900 families represented a dramatic 25 percent increase over the previous 12 months.

In one month alone — this past June — CORA provided free food to nearly 1,700 people. It was by far the busiest month in its history.

CORA is the largest pantry in the county. It has a remarkable record of community support, much of it provided by young people. It is not uncommon for a group of first and second graders to arrive at CORA's doorstep with bags of food they have gathered by their own grit and ingenuity.

"This kind of support for the work of the CORA pantry is indeed incredible," says Jim Abrahamson, a volunteer and board member who helps organize and guide the food drives staged by school youth, churches and businesses. "It is amazing what some young people can achieve."

Considerable support for CORA comes from fundraisers like the upcoming hunger walk. Numerous other food and fund drives are staged by Chatham County businesses, school groups, churches, civic clubs,

## Fall Harvest Party to fight hunger



For the past three years, gracepoint has been fighting hunger in Chatham County through the Fall Harvest Party. This year, gracepoint is teaming

with CORA, Chatham Mills, the Time Machine Band, Carolina Brewery and Horizons Cellars and Lock and Key events to offer the best Fall Harvest Party yet. The Lock and Key Singles Party ([www.lockandkeyevents.com/index.php/home/regiondisplay/RD](http://www.lockandkeyevents.com/index.php/home/regiondisplay/RD)) begins at 6 p.m. and doors open for the dance at 7:30 p.m. at the Chatham Mills in Pittsboro. The \$20 admission and the food drive that evening are designed to benefit CORA, the Chatham County Food Bank as hunger is on the rise in Chatham County and across the United States. Details at: [www.gracepointcommunity.org](http://www.gracepointcommunity.org)

local grocers and other organizations.

Howard Willett of Goldston, a long-time volunteer and a current board member, notes that the involvement of young people in the fight on hunger teaches an important lesson.

"Many young people assume that if they have plenty to eat, so does everyone else. But through teachers and leaders at school and church, they learn this isn't so. That there are hungry people with us every day of the year.

"Because of food drives and other activities, young people learn what it means to help others. And in so doing they become the heart and conscience of the next generation."

*Don DeVore, a former journalist and public relations executive, is an active volunteer with CORA. CORA Food Pantry is located at 40 Camp Drive in Pittsboro. Mail: PO Box 1326, Pittsboro, NC 27312. Phone: 919.542.5020.*

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**2008 Chatham Hunger Walk**

**Sunday, Nov. 2**  
**RAIN OR SHINE**

- 6 and 3 mile routes thru scenic Pittsboro
- Gathering point: Pittsboro Elementary School
- Pre-walk events & Registration: 1:00pm
- Walk begins: 2:30pm
- Free T-shirts for Walkers
- Free refreshments

Also happening in Pittsboro Nov. 1 and 2

- gracepoint's Harvestfest benefit dance
- First Sunday
- Empty Bowls CORA Fundraiser (handmade bowls from Chatham potters)

Proceeds for the 2008 Chatham Hunger Walk will go to CORA Food Pantry to support people in need throughout Chatham County.

**CORA FOOD PANTRY**

Feeding people in need since 1989 -- Located at 40 Camp Drive, Pittsboro  
Mailing address: P.O. Box 1326, Pittsboro, NC 27312 -- Phone: 919/545-3030

**Get Involved!**

- Form or join a walk team
- Sponsor a walker or a team
- Great for churches, scout troops, schools, clubs, businesses, sports teams... so many possibilities.
- NEW THIS YEAR! On-line teams. Go to: [www.firstgiving.com/CORA](http://www.firstgiving.com/CORA) to form your team or give on-line.
- For info, call: 919/545-3030 or Email: [ChathamHungerWalk@embarqmail.com](mailto:ChathamHungerWalk@embarqmail.com)
- Please make checks payable to: "Chatham Hunger Walk"