

Human Services' holiday helping season begins today

NEWINGTON

By **ERICA DRZEWIECKI**
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Human Services is moving full speed ahead into the holiday season, beginning with its Thanksgiving food distribution this week.

A total of 378 Newington households in need have signed up to receive a Thanksgiving bird (turkey or chicken) and ingredients to make all the fixings.

The distribution is set to take place today in delivery and pick-up fashion.

"We're doing about twice as many deliveries as last year," Human Services Director Carol LaBrecque said Tuesday. "Obviously the pandemic adds a set of challenges and obstacles to this whole production, but we're being very careful — following all protocols, wearing masks, distancing and wearing gloves."

Families who come to pick up their packages of food have

been instructed to follow signs through the library parking lot to Town Hall, where volunteers will be ready to place bags in their vehicles in a contactless manner.

Volunteers are scheduled to work staggered shifts in order to minimize the amount of interaction they have with each other and the public, according to LaBrecque.

"Our volunteers are amazing and have been so supportive," she said.

Some people who give of themselves every year have returned again, while others are taking a year off due to the health risks associated with potential exposure to covid-19. New volunteers have also stepped up.

In general, the department is handling a lot more cases this year. Services and assistance are provided to people who are struggling financially and/or emotionally.

Instead of meeting people in person, staff has been conducting

all business via telephone and video calls.

"People were able to maintain for the first few months of the pandemic, and now we're seeing folks that are more affected in a long term way," LaBrecque said. "We're doing our best to connect people with resources and assist them when we can."

The department is also gearing up for the 2020 Holiday Gift Distribution, with a speedy turnaround right after Thanksgiving.

In past years, this program would typically take place inside Town Hall, where families would "shop" for gifts on tables set up by staff and volunteers, also taking home requested gifts for specific family members. This year, the pandemic has altered plans a bit.

"People will be scheduled to come in at some point over the course of those four days," LaBrecque explained. "They'll park and call our office and we'll have volunteers ready to bring



Courtesy photo

Pre-packaged food for families in need, distributed by Newington Human Services.

their gifts out."

She anticipates by December there will be just over 400 households registered, or close to

1,000 people.

Gifts will primarily be in the form of gift cards this year, instead of toys or specific items.

The deadline for donations is Dec. 11. Distribution will take place Dec. 15-18 outside Town Hall. Sponsors are needed. Contact Newington Human Services at 860-665-8590 if you are able to help.

"It's been a challenge with the pandemic but the Newington community is really very supportive of this program," LaBrecque said. "People have already come forward with financial donations, also bringing in food and gift cards."

Following the Thanksgiving distribution, the shelves of the Newington Food Bank will be bare and need replenishing. To schedule a time to drop off donations, call 860-665-8590.

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It's oil in the family when making 'Blessing Bags' at Plymouth Oil

PLYMOUTH

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Chet Scoville of Plymouth Oil and his family are putting together "Blessing Bags" with clothing and essential supplies for the homeless.

Jessica Scoville, Chet's wife, said her husband along with his grandsons, Pierce, 8, Charlie, 5, and stepdaughter Mackenzie, 15, are putting together Blessing Bags to show how people "can still make kindness count while being safe during covid-19."

"Plymouth Oil is in the business of keeping families warm and that is more important than ever with many people still working and schooling from home," she said. "Our family has noticed an increase in homeless individuals asking for food on street corners. What do you say to young children who ask about these people?"

Scoville said that schools running at limited capacity and strict covid-19 rules have limited opportunities for kids to participate in community service,



Photo courtesy of Plymouth Oil

Chet Scoville and his family assembling "Blessing Bags."

such as through the Kids in the Middle and LEO Clubs.

Therefore, Scoville has purchased items to create "Blessing Bags" which will be kept in the Plymouth Oil service trucks and the Scoville family's personal vehicles to hand out "the next time the kids ask 'why is that man holding a sign that says homeless please help.'"

The bags include items such as new hats, gloves, socks, travel cups, bags of hot cocoa and tea, mini orange juices, Tylenol pack-

ets, chapsticks, face masks, cough drops, Band-Aids, toothbrushes and toothpaste, deodorants, ponchos, breakfast bars, travel packs of peanut butter, bags of trail mix and crackers and \$1 bills.

"Blessing bags are a great way to safely involve children in community service while at home during the current health pandemic," said Jessica Scoville. "Similar bags can be made for first responders and teachers to show gratitude for the work they have done over the past seven

months during covid-19."

Chet Scoville said his family, for years, has donated their time to community service. He said that when his grandchildren started asking him about the homeless, he was motivated to do something to help out.

"While the government is doing a lot to help people I feel that the homeless often get left out," he said. "You really don't know everyone's situation and I wanted to do something extra to help them. I thought it would be a good idea to put these bags together. We're going to put one in each of our vehicles and give them out if we come across someone on the street. I'm telling my guys who are going out with the trucks that if they see someone and have the opportunity to give one of the bags out that they should do it as well. It's an opportunity to teach the kids about volunteering and treating people with respect. It's a good way to instill values in the younger generation."

Jessica Scoville added that her husband believes that the "youth

are our future." Therefore, the "Kindness Counts" scholarship will be made available to two graduating seniors again this year.

The "Kindness Counts" scholarship was created last year by Grela Well Drilling and Plymouth Oil Service to benefit one male and one female Terryville High School senior. Applicants are asked to write an essay stating how they have demonstrated kindness throughout their school journey, how it has impacted their life or how their career will promote kindness.

"Chet hopes that what he and his family are doing helps encourage students and their families to find a way to make Kindness Count, especially with all the negativity surrounding politics and the health pandemic our country has been faced with," said Jessica Scoville. "More now than ever, kindness is what our country needs."

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