



Volunteer Stephanie Mallett brought her daughter, Alissa, and her niece, Montique Clemmon, to Gleaners last week.

A Morning's Work at The Community Food Bank

By Gerald Scott
Photos by Bill Springer

A Day in the Life of a local food bank, namely Gleaners Community Food Bank, is actually quite a sight to behold.

On a recent Tuesday morning, for example, there were two dozen Chrysler employees from the automaker's Regulatory Affairs staff that were volunteering their time, packing food boxes, sorting and the like.

At the same time, a dozen or more teens from Orchard Lake St. Mary's High School were doing similar sorting and packing.

This was all occurring at the Gleaners Community Food Bank warehouse on E. Columbia in Pontiac, very near the GM parts service center and other industrial concerns.

Michael D. McDonald, senior director of Agency/Program Support, discussed the impact that these corporate volunteers have on the overall Gleaners operations, which includes a half-dozen in Southeast Michigan, including the Pontiac site.

"(About) 14.5 percent of all Oakland County residents are in some type of risk or need for food. And in children, the ratio is a little bit higher - one in five children have some type of food-hunger risk. And that's Oakland County in particular," McDonald said.

"I would say a lot of it (food need) is centrally located in the Pontiac area here. There are some pockets in need more than others, same with Wayne County as well - you have particular areas in need.

"Gleaners, as a whole, we rely on over 35,000 volunteers on an annual basis. We have roughly 50 to 60 full-time employees throughout our five-county service area.

"But what these volunteers do is they will pack the food, they will assemble the product, they will do all of this manual labor that really allows us to stay (lean).

"So these volunteers are what makes us so efficient - they're doing the work. The community, this is a community business for our community.

"Big Three is here quite a bit, along with others like Deloitte, PNC Bank, it's daily to weekly that we have some large organization come in and do volunteer work."

The Chrysler volunteers and OLSM high school student volunteers watch safety and related videos prior to actually working in the shop.

Further, Jenna Yuhase, volunteer coordinator at the Pontiac Gleaners, talks to the employees ahead of time as well, discussing the history of the name, "Gleaners," and its origins in the Book of Ruth from the Bible.

The Gleaner's McDonald, for one, greatly appreciates what these volunteers from Chrysler, GM and the rest of the compa-

nies do for this hands-on charity.

"They'll go out into the warehouse and work a good two to three hours (at a time)," McDonald said.

"Whether they're sorting reclamation that's been donated from a Meier, or Kroger's, or one of our local Hiller's markets, or something like that, (they help).

"Or, they'll build particular things for one of our programs, like our backpack program or our 'Smart Bites' program.

"Smart Bites are healthy snacks that teachers can have in their classrooms for throughout the day, if they're noticing a kid is lethargic or their attention span is not there. Or if they didn't get breakfast, they can have a snack that tides them over until lunch time. That's our Smart Bites program.

"We also have a backpack program, which is 10-12 pounds of product that goes home with the students for the weekend.

"Just recently, we're embarking into our second year of the School Mobile program. There are parents at home, other kids at home," McDonald said.

"So we have a School Mobile program that will actually go right to the school and distribute 40 to 50 pounds of food, on a monthly basis, that the parents can take home."

This was all occurring on a busy Tuesday morning in early October.

McDonald also made the distinction that just because a food product had reached its "use by" date doesn't mean it magically becomes inedible. He said the smart use of food, including using common sense on foodstuffs that are approaching or past the "use by" date makes for a more wholesome use of the food.

Meanwhile, afterward, Bill and I went over to Culver's in Lake Orion, discussed the day's events, did an interview with owner Joe Zimmer, and lost track of time.

When we got back to Gleaners, the gate was closed. A quick phone call, and Jesse Magee, the Pontiac Gleaners hi-lo operator, was kind enough to come back and let me in to get my car!



David Bernier of Chrysler Regulatory Affairs moved a lot of boxes, others do their part (in background).



Bob Moran's group from Orchard Lake St. Mary's.



A pallet spill provided a glimpse of how much food goes through this place.



The opportunity to volunteer for this kind of work brings all kinds of people together. New friends are made, and a group photo taken.