

## Last Saturday Food Meets the Challenge

So what advice would Jean Moore, ALIVE! Food Chair, offer to anyone managing a non-profit operation facing sharply increasing demand and unreliable supply? “Plan, organize, bargain, buy, improvise – and then pray!” she said with a smile.

ALIVE!’s Last Saturday Food Distribution (LSFD) program distributes bags of groceries at three different sites in the City of Alexandria on the last Saturday of each month. Through this program, ALIVE! seeks to serve the ever-increasing numbers of Alexandria’s families in need that qualify under federal income guidelines. The food distributed includes canned and packaged goods, as well as fresh bread, meats, and produce. Clients are referred for food by their social workers at public and private agencies, and by ALIVE!’s affiliated congregations.

This program normally serves 1200 to 1600 people per month, with demand fluctuating with the seasons (lower in summer and higher in fall and spring). However, a year ago, as ALIVE!’s clients were affected by the deepening recession, more and more people were referred for Last-Saturday food assistance. Starting in October 2008, the number of people needing extra help with food at the end of each month began to exceed prior-year levels by 35% or more.

Then on March 28 the program faced an unforeseen and dramatic spike in demand when 2770 people needed food. (Even now that this unusual spike has passed, Last-Saturday Food demand continues to significantly exceed last year’s levels.)

At the same time the need for food was increasing, food supplies became problematic. The U.S. Department of Agriculture used to provide as many as 14 to 15 different surplus food items every month. That number now fluctuates greatly -- as it did in July, sometimes to as few as six or seven items. In addition, grocery stores have been finding efficiencies by cutting back on their orders of fresh foods. This has reduced the cost of spoilage for the stores – but it also has reduced the amount of leftover bread and produce available for donation to local food banks such as ALIVE! .

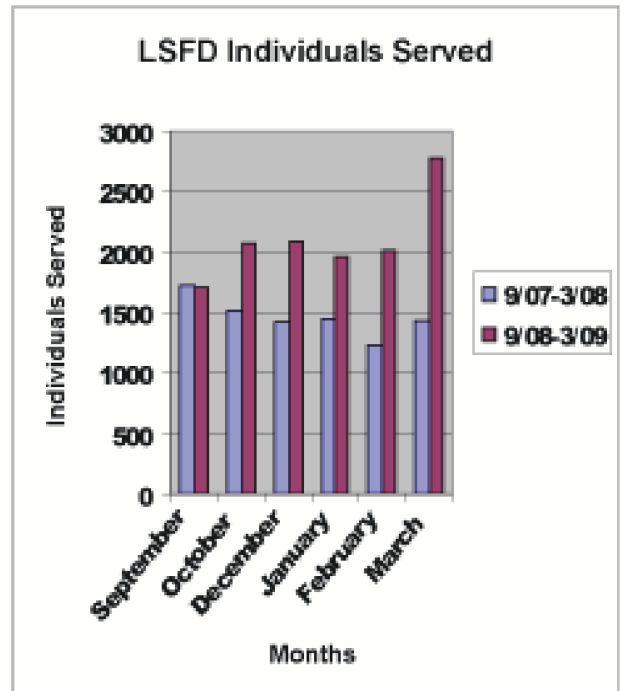
Faced with challenges such as these, how can ALIVE! respond? The LSFD program is managed and operated entirely by volunteers. How do they do it? According to Jean Moore, they do it by constantly adjusting demand forecasts and buying more food from the Capital Area Food Bank and other sources to heavily supplement the food donations that ALIVE! receives. Luckily, ALIVE!’s donors have been supporting this effort with increased contributions of both food and cash.

To accommodate the larger crowds at food distribution sites, ALIVE! has lengthened its hours of operation when necessary and at one site has assured anxious clients that anyone arriving by 11 AM will receive food. To deliver on that promise, ALIVE! volunteers learned to calibrate carefully the amount of food given out early in the morning, to ensure that food will be available for the 11 AM arrivals. And, when surprised by especially large numbers of clients at the last minute, volunteers



Lines were long at the Last Saturday Food Distribution at Cora Kelly Recreation Center in February.

have run out to the ALIVE! food warehouse to obtain and distribute immediately food that had been set aside for a later month. “While robbing Peter to pay Paul is not an ideal way to operate” said Jean Moore, “we have always been blessed by unexpected donations that have bailed us out. Just put your faith in prayers.”



*“ I heard the voice of the Lord, saying,  
Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?  
Then said I, Here am I; send me.”      Isaiah 6:8*