

UNEXPECTED RELIEF

Pantries replenished by FEMA

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Contributing Writer

Immediately following Hurricane Ike, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) dropped off multiple truckloads of food to be dispersed to residents who needed assistance.

However, it seems that there was more than plenty as an estimated 10 tons of food laid in reserve at the "old Wal-mart" in Liberty, a building now owned by Liberty County. The doors to replenishment have been reopened.

Tom Branch, Liberty County Emergency Management Coordinator, realized that the majority of the food reserves will be expiring soon and quickly contacted the Texas Division of Emergency Management to ask permission to donate them to appropriate agencies.

He explained, "Once the food hit the ground in Liberty County, it belonged to us. Although, we still needed to ask permission to go ahead and give it away. Letting it sit in storage just doesn't make any sense now; there's a lot of hungry people out there."

After permission was granted, Liberty County Long-Term Recovery Committee teamed with Liberty County Emergency Management to help coordinate the food giveaway among local food pantries and non-profit organizations that include: Shiloh Ministries, Operation Refuge, Spirit of Sharing, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Pregnancy Care Center of Dayton, Liberty Ministers United, St. Vincent de Paul, and Trinity Baptist Association.

Many local churches have also benefited from the food giveaway, and several other local agencies and food pantries are lined up to pick up the rest of the food this week.

With so much food in reserve,



FOOD

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some local residents have asked why it had not been given away earlier, but Branch assured that the correct decision was made to wait until now.

"We've made the logical decision by giving out this food now after the passing of the recent hurricane season and before the majority of the food expires in a few months," he said.

By observing many who entered to gather food, the food reserves resembled a newfound treasure as all left with sparkles in their eyes and smiles from ear-to-ear.

With a huge smile on his face, Sam Windell with Cleveland-based Operation Refuge said, "This food is going to help out a lot of people."

At a time when the going is tough, it surely will.

Photo by PAUL GRAHAM/The Advocate
Sam Windell with Cleveland-based Operation Refuge Inc. fills his truck with boxes of food that are bound for ORI's food pantry. The food was given to local food banks by Liberty County. It was originally given to Liberty County by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in preparation for hurricane season. In recent years, Texas has had an active hurricane season.