



LOCAL NEWS

Group reviews needs for more food assistance

By **Karen Brainard** 5 p.m. Dec. 11, 2015

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Ramona Food and Clothes Closet volunteers Jimmy Thompson, left, and Noah Lewis unload big bags of carrots from the Feeding America Mobile Pantry. — *Karen Brainard*

Seeing a potential need for more food assistance in the community, a group of people representing different organizations gathered in First Congregational Church recently to open the dialogue and review programs in place.



In the Ramona Food and Clothes Closet's parking lot, volunteers, from left, Heather Sossong, Joyce Morales and Vicki Bookhammer stand ready for customers at the Feeding America Mobile

“It was actually a real productive meeting,” said Arthur Blanck, who started Serve Ramona a year ago as an interfaith organization to identify and address community needs, and to provide service opportunities.

Joining Blanck in spearheading efforts to bring more food distribution services to Ramona is Nancy Roy, Palomar Health

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Pantry, which offers free food on the third Thursday of each month. — *Karen Brainard*

community outreach liaison and a Ramona resident. Among those attending the meeting were leaders from Ramona Food and Clothes Closet, Calvary Chapel, First Congregational Church, In His Steps, Vista Hill and North County Health Services.

“It’s really kind of bringing the group together to meet the needs of the community,” he said. “It’s a cooperative effort.”

Several food distribution programs are currently offered, he noted. Calvary Chapel obtains pallets of food from San Diego Food Bank every other Saturday and gives recipients about two to three days worth of fresh food, said Blanck, adding that the church serves about 370 people each time. The distribution is held at the church, 114 14th St.

Ramona Food and Clothes Closet, 773 Main St., also distributes food, including partnering with Feeding America the third Thursday morning of each month, offering tables of meal items in its parking lot.

Every Monday at 6 p.m., Open Door Ministry offers a hot meal in the Ramona Grange, 215 Seventh St., Although churches in town take turns preparing the meals, Blanck said attendance is down.

“Getting the word out and promoting the food distribution events was one item of discussion,” said Blanck. Another topic was doing a gap assessment to identify gaps where those needing food assistance are not being reached.

Feeding America, he said, “thinks Ramona is an under-served area in North County.”

Blanck said they found that there are a number of people between 12th and Eighth streets who could use the food distribution services but have no transportation, and therefore the group talked about the possibility of a mobile unit to reach such pockets. While such a unit would not go door-to-door, he said, they could find a central location for distribution.

The group also wants to identify a central spot in town for easy access to food distribution services, Blanck said.

One problem, Blanck said, is that the current food distribution services only provide a few days' supply. With the way the economy has been, he said, at First Congregational they are seeing more people, not necessarily church members, coming in needing assistance such as paying utility bills. Normally, Blanck said, they see people come in at the end or the beginning of a year for help, but this year they have seen a continual need.

"This year's been a busier year...than the previous year," he said.

The group is planning to meet again Jan. 22 at First Congregational Church, said Blanck. Any organizations that are interested in participating may contact Blanck through the Serve Ramona Facebook page.
