

The Star-Ledger

November 13, 2015

Students learn the meaning of giving at Thanksgiving

By MaryAnn Spoto



Middle school students from Solomon Schechter Day School of Greater Monmouth County in Freehold and Saint Peter School in Point Pleasant Beach got a tour of the FoodBank of Monmouth and Ocean Counties on Thursday before they help unload 1,500 frozen turkeys donated by Stop & Shop in time for Thanksgiving. (MaryAnn Spoto |

NEPTUNE — Walking into the well-stocked massive warehouse of the FoodBank of Monmouth and Ocean Counties on Tuesday, a group of middle school students could easily have wondered why their donations were needed.

Then Ryan Hubler, development coordinator for the agency, made it very clear: the food bank, struggling with a shortage of turkeys, needs to provide 11 million meals a year.

If they couldn't wrap their heads around that figure, Linda Keenan, director of development at the food bank, had another statistic they could probably process: of the 132,000 people that the food bank serves in the two counties, 40,000 are children.

The need hasn't gotten any lighter, she said. Since 2010, at the heart of the economic recession, the food bank has experienced an 85-percent increase in the number of people it feeds through more than 300 pantries, Keenan said.

"The economic downturn really hasn't moved in any direction other than down," Keenan said. "And after Superstorm Sandy, we still have 4,000 people still displaced."

On Thursday, 62 seventh- and eighth- graders from Solomon Schechter Day School of Greater Monmouth County in Marlboro and ***Saint Peter School in Point Pleasant Beach*** got to see first-hand the inner workings of the system that supplies food to struggling families.

"This is an example of kids helping kids, neighbor helping neighbor," Keenan said.

After dumping their food donations into a bin, the students helped unload 1,500 frozen turkeys donated by the Stop & Shop grocery store in Neptune City.

Store manager Pat Scott said this makes the tenth consecutive year his store has donated turkeys to the food bank. Overall, Stop & Shop stores in New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts and Rhode Island are collectively donating nearly 21,000 turkeys this holiday season.

"This is part of us being a better neighbor to the community," Scott said. "It's so important we do this this year because of the bird shortage."

An avian flu epidemic earlier this year – the worst in the nation's history – wiped out more than 8 million turkeys, which drove up the price of the birds. Because of that price increase, the food bank couldn't afford to buy all of the 14,000 turkeys it needs in time for Thanksgiving.

Keenan said with donations from Stop & Shop, McDonald's and some local foundations, the food bank should be able to reach its goal.