

Holiday Helping



JBy Barbara LaBoe / The Daily News The Daily News Online | Posted: Saturday, December 25, 2010
John Markon / The Daily News CAP employees TR Davies and Lisa Chavez rush to redo bags of food after some food spoiled during a power outage. Most of the contents of each bag had to be replaced.

CAP staff and volunteers were busier than Santa's elves Saturday morning as they hustled to rescue Christmas meals for the elderly and shut-ins in the region.

Lower Columbia Action Program crews arrived to prep Saturday morning and discovered a power outage had caused all the special holiday meals in the walk-in cooler to spoil. The meal recipients were counting on the food, though, so the workers grabbed regular frozen meals from the main CAP building, frantically heated them up and repackaged other items before the volunteer drivers arrived.

"It won't be the holiday meals we planned, but we're making it work," said CAP Senior Services Manager TR Davies as staff and volunteers hurtled around the kitchen in the PeaceHealth Broadway Campus kitchen.

This is the fifth year volunteers have delivered special holiday meals on Thanksgiving and Christmas. Previously, Meals on Wheels and home health clients who needed food were given frozen meals ahead of time that they could heat up on the actual holiday.

On Saturday, 11 volunteer drivers delivered 75 meals to residents throughout the region, stretching from Woodland to Silver Lake, Davies said. CAP delivers about 250 Meals on Wheels meals daily, but Saturday's packages were for the elderly or ill who don't have family and can't get out to other holiday meals. Several of the drivers said they were thrilled at the chance to do something helpful for others on the holiday.

Longview couple Donna and Bob Mansfield initially planned to deliver some meals but instead were reassigned to the assembly line inside the kitchen as meals were repackaged. The couple scooped tapioca pudding into small to-go containers to replace the spoiled desserts.

"We figured we'd do something helpful and also thought that regular drivers might want to spend the holiday with their families," Donna Mansfield said.

Tony and Marina Giles delivered meals to several Longview residents, an assignment they'd also accepted on Thanksgiving Day.

Marina Giles said they wanted to give back on the holiday and also show their two young sons the value of helping others. Hayden is 7 and Evan is 3.

"We wanted to teach them the importance of giving," she said as the family loaded the meals in their car.

At their first stop, retired nurse Mariana Clifford couldn't stop thanking the family enough, shaking hands and hugging them as is tradition in her native Germany.

"Thank you so much," Clifford said, reaching to hug every member of the family in turn. (Evan was a bit shy but did wave goodbye later). "I really appreciate this. Thank you, thank you, thank you."