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Attorney Kenneth Allen, left, hands a holiday food basket to Sandra Curtis of Portage Thursday outside the Jewel/Osco in Chesterton. Allen has been providing food to the needy for 22 years. (Amy Lavalley / Post-Tribune)

Program delivers food baskets to 1,000

By Amy Lavalley
Post-Tribune

Felesha Casler waited in line outside the Chesterton Jewel/Osco Thursday with several dozen other people.

The Valparaiso woman and the others were waiting for Thanksgiving food baskets in an assistance program coordinated by the Greater Food Bank of Northwest Indiana, attorney Kenneth Allen, and Jewel.

“It helps a lot. We had a really tough year. I’m very thankful for it,” said Casler, adding her mother-in-law was sick, which pushed them “to this point. All the money has been going towards the bills.”

She and her husband have been working and taking care of their home and two kids, ages 3 and 7.

“It’s great. I guess we never really asked for help before. It’s the first year we had to do this,” she said.

Between the stop at Jewel/Osco and another that followed at Carter Memorial Church in Gary, the program distributed 1,000 food baskets with turkey, green beans, corn, cranberry sauce, mashed potatoes and stuffing.

Many of the recipients are already clients of the area’s 107 food pantries that are in the food bank’s network, said Arleen Peterson, the food bank’s executive director.

“A lot of our pantries are feeding families consistently but this is an opportunity to provide a lot of big-ticket items like turkeys and sides,” she said, adding radio station WSHE also helped with the effort.

Allen has been helping those in need in some fashion for 22 years, and providing food at Thanksgiving has been part of those plans for around 20 years.

“This is a great thing to have a partnership like this,” he said, as Peterson thanked him for the effort and how much it meant to its recipients.

That included Sandra Curtis of Portage, who said she’s facing medical bills.

“I have no insurance for what has to get covered, so this is helping a great deal,” she said.

Amy Lavalley is a freelance reporter for the Post-Tribune.
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