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Volunteers bring enough hands to move food bank to Lakewood

The Resource Distribution Council, which is usually the one doing the giving, receives much-needed assistance to move to a new site.

BY SCOTT FONTAINE

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The Resource Distribution Council warehouse was buzzing Tuesday. A fork-lift transported pallets onto a truck. Volunteers shrink-wrapped boxes. Others moved what they could with their bare hands.

And, while taking a break from packing up her office near the back of the warehouse, Anna Wingate couldn't stop smiling "It's the spirit of human kindness" said Wingate, the food bank's founder and president. "It's just been amazing." A few weeks ago, the RD C was in bad shape. It had to move but couldn't afford it. Previous attempts to raise extra funds fell far short of what was needed - as much as \$20,000 - and the future of the organization was in jeopardy.

But the community stepped in to change that An article in The News Tribune on Oct. 5 documented the plight of the food bank, which serves 9,500 people monthly and distributes 1.5 million pounds of food annually. Calls and letters began pouring in that morning. Some people offered money. Others offered labor. Suddenly, the future didn't look as bleak.

Wingate took a call that day from Kris Manning, the executive dean of instruction at Bates Technical College. The school's heating, ventilation and air conditioning program was already helping the food bank, and Manning volunteered his trucking and electrical students. The school says 84 students have helped so far, saving the organization thousands of dollars.

By Tuesday morning, the ware-house at 4020 S. 56th St. had been emptied, and the space inside its Lakewood home was beginning to fill up.

"The amount of physical labor people have offered to give us has been amazing," Wingate said. "It's overwhelming. We've actually had to turn people away - that's how much people have offered."

Others donated something else that was desperately needed: money.

Wingate said the food bank received donations from 16 people. The biggest check was for \$1,000. Others gave what they could - \$10, \$25, \$30.

"A few of them drove over and handed the money to us and apologized that they couldn't give us more," she said. "Those are the ones that are precious."

Tommy McClure, a student at Bates, said he read the article and sympathized with the food bank. When he heard from an instructor that students were going to help, he said he was "more than happy to do it?"

There's also a practical purpose with helping out.

"It's a pretty good situation for both sides," he said. "We get real-life experience, and we also get to help the community!"

Dan French, a truck-driving instructor at Bates, said he and his students have donated about 30 hours of labor, and they'll contribute another 14 this week.

He says it helps give perspective to instructors and students alike.

"These guys get to see what truck driving is really all about," he said. "It's not just about making money, but about helping people!"

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