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## **Shelter received bountiful harvest... from volunteers from all walks**

Help is never too far away during the holidays, a time of especially great need at Fisherman's Mark in Lambertville, N.J.

*By Joe D'Aquila, Assistant Editor*

By the time Jennifer Mowery and her daughter Peyton dropped off their contribution to the Thanksgiving food drive at Fisherman's Mark, volunteer workers were already busy inside, stuffing bags full of holiday fixings to accompany the many turkeys they'd soon be distributing.

Six-year-old Peyton and her Brownie Troop, 1661, from New Hope-Solebury Elementary School, had gathered enough food to provide complete dinners, from the main course to pumpkin pie, for two families in need.

Peyton's mom, who has often donated to Fisherman's Mark, said they were happy to help out and spoke enthusiastically about the group's efforts.

"We consider this to be our community's food bank," Mowery said. "They do great work here."

Fisherman's Mark is a non-profit group, based in Lambertville, N.J., that works as an independent social services agency for the less fortunate throughout the area, in both New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

For this Thanksgiving, the agency is working towards filling the holiday plates of 272 families, at last count.

Saturday, volunteers packaged all of the food items that had been collected from recent food drives or donated directly to the organization, to prepare them for distribution on the following Monday

and Tuesday.

When volunteers arrived at their facilities on North Main Street, there was a breakdown list of the things that needed to be completed before distribution.

Among the more daunting tasks stood an enormous box containing 1,500 pounds of potatoes, donated by area farmers. Before being sent to the individual families, the potatoes needed to be divided and bagged.

Luckily, the Calvary (sic) was on its way in the form of a Pack of Boy Scouts.

Just earlier in the week, Jan Ubel, a den leader with Webelos Pack 3464, called Fisherman's mark to see if they needed some assistance preparing for the holiday drives.

The scouts needed to complete service hours toward earning their Citizenship Badge, and Ubel thought Fisherman's Mark would be a good place for them to complete them, as the boys had helped organize food drives for the agency.

"We called them up and asked, 'hey, could you use about 20 kids to help out?'" she said, admittedly thinking when she called, the folks at the agency might be too busy to have a large group of nine-and ten-year-olds running around. "They said, 'sure, send them on over.'"

A surge of seemingly boundless energy from the pack made quick work of those potatoes. Within an hour the 1,500 pounds were all in bags and ready to be sent out.

"We love having the kids," said B.J. Petty, Fisherman's Mark's executive director. "They're a huge help, and they get the opportunity to see where the food they've helped collect ends up."

While most of the scouts worked on that box of spuds, others helped the agency's volunteers divide the rest of the food into bags, or helped stock the pantry, where any goods not going to holiday meals are

stored for the agency's year-round efforts to feed the hungry.

Petty said the Thanksgiving donations went to families the organizations had worked with throughout the year and had demonstrated the need for special assistance during holidays.

Each family would receive one bag per every three family members that contained everything needed for an enjoyable holiday feast.

Cans of gravy, cranberry sauce, fruits and vegetables, boxes of instant mashed potatoes and stuffing all went into each bag that would find its way, along with a frozen turkey, and of course a bag of potatoes to a family in need.

"We've been doing this for 23 years," Petty said. "We put together the big drives three times a year, at Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter."

Petty and the other volunteers won't get much time to rest after their own holiday meals, as the Christmas efforts are already underway, with a similar food-drive plus the "Adopt a Child For the Holidays" program, a partnership with New Hope-Solebury High School's Key Club.

Through that program, Fisherman's Mark provides the wish lists of needy children to the Key Club who helps find sponsors to purchase the gifts for a child.

But for now at least, Petty was delighted with the results of this year's Thanksgiving drive and said it wouldn't be possible without the help of volunteers and the whole community.

"This is its own wonderful kind of magic," Petty said. "We put out the need, and the community responds. Seeing it all come together is just phenomenal. This is the best job in town."