

Food banks swamped by Christmas need Demand climbs 20 per cent

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Demand for Christmas food hampers for the poor has skyrocketed by 20 per cent this year, and local food banks say they have never seen such an increase in the need for help.

A total of 12,375 families and individuals have registered for the holiday season bundles compared to 10,347 last year, says Joanne Santucci, executive director of Hamilton Food Share.

"I would say this is the most challenging year that food banks have ever faced," she says. "The increased need is because of the recession, job losses, difficulties in the manufacturing sector, and people who don't qualify for EI."

Today Hamilton Food Share officially kicks off its holiday food drive that will conclude Dec. 24. The drive is a major effort to fill the hampers. There are also corporate donations and municipal government supports, plus food and toy drives by Food Share member agencies such as Mission Services and the Neighbour to Neighbour Centre.

"We need food and money to put those hampers together. We don't want to deny one person who reaches out," says Santucci.

Hampers hold a turkey, ham or large chicken, depending on the family's preference, and a variety of foods and household items. Games and toys are included for children.

Alan Whittle, from the Good Shepherd Centre, says that agency has seen a 25 per cent increase in demand for Christmas hampers. More than 3,500 hampers are being sought this year, which he believes is the highest total ever.

Denise Arkell, executive director of the Neighbour to Neighbour Centre, says the food bank has a waiting list of more than 100. The centre needs more than 950 hampers this year compared to 800 last year.

"We knew we were going to get hit with more people this year, but we didn't realize we were going to get hit as bad," she says.

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Spectator file photo Hamilton food banks are facing unprecedented demand and are having trouble meeting the need for Christmas food hampers.

Spectator file photo

Helping Hamilton Food Share is as easy as 1-2-3. Here's how:

1. Drop off non-perishable food items at the following participating food drive collection sites:

Fire stations (full time only):

35-43 John St. N., Hamilton
1400 Upper Wellington St., Hamilton
935 Garth St., Hamilton
729 Upper Sherman Ave., Hamilton
1000 Limeridge Rd. E., Hamilton
246 Wentworth St. N., Hamilton
225 Quigley Rd., Hamilton
400 Melvin Ave., Hamilton
125 Kenilworth Ave. N., Hamilton
1455 Main St. W., Hamilton
24 Ray St. S., Hamilton
365 Wilson St. W., Ancaster
661 Garner Rd. E., Ancaster
346 Park St. W., Dundas
199 Hwy 8, Stoney Creek
363 Isaac Brock Dr., Stoney Creek
256 Parkside Dr., Waterdown

Police stations:

155 King William St., Hamilton
400 Rymal Rd. E., Hamilton
2825 King St. E., Hamilton
2 King St. W., Dundas

Other locations:

Rona Cashway, 137 King St. W. Dundas
CHCH 163 Jackson St. W. (go to back door security)
Upper James Toyota, 999 Upper James, Hamilton
Parkdale Toyota, 191 Centennial Pkwy N., Hamilton
Barry's Jeweller's, 730 Upper James, Hamilton

Price Choppers:

1565 Barton St. E., Hamilton
869 Barton St. E., Hamilton

Zeller's, 1576 Upper James Hamilton

Prime Financial Savings and Credit Union:

735 South Service Rd., Unit 201 Stoney Creek
2245 Rymal Rd. E., Stoney Creek
1005 King St. E., Hamilton

2. Any CARSTAR Collision/Express Location:

605 Hwy 53 E., Ancaster
350 Parkdale Ave. N., Hamilton
77 Ferguson Ave. S., Hamilton
1655 Main St. W., Hamilton
322 Gage Ave. N., Hamilton
1124 Rymal Rd. E., Hamilton
498 Arvin Ave., Stoney Creek

2. Purchase a pre-made bag of food at local Fortinos for \$7. Along with the food, a donation of \$2 will go directly to Hamilton Food Share for every bag sold.

Participating Fortino's stores:

75 Centennial Parkway N., Hamilton
102 Hwy 8, Stoney Creek
50 Dundurn St., Hamilton
65 Mall Rd., Hamilton
1550 Upper James, Hamilton
54 Wilson St. W., Ancaster
21 Upper Centennial Parkway S., Stoney Creek
1579 Main St. W., Hamilton
115 Hamilton St. N., Waterdown

3. Make a financial donation. Send a cheque to Hamilton Food Share by mail: 339 Barton St., Stoney Creek, ON, L8E 2L2 or call them at (905) 664-9065 to donate by credit card. Or, go online to hamiltonfoodshare.org and follow the links.