

# HRA pantry a 'lifesaver'

## It serves city's northwest area

By **ROBERT STORACE**  
STAFF WRITER



Robert Storace | Staff  
Canned items inside the food pantry at 460 Osgood Ave.

**NEW BRITAIN** — As most people are gearing up to shop for the holidays, many city residents are barely getting by and depend on the generosity of others through the city's seven food pantries.

New Britain's only food pantry in the northwestern part of the city is staffed by the New Britain Human Resources Agency and offers a wide variety of fruits, vegetables, meats and drinks weekly.

Residents are allowed to visit the pantry — located at 460 Osgood Ave. — twice a month.

See **FOOD**, Page 4

# Food pantry a 'lifesaver' for city's northwest residents

Continued from Page 1

Those who do receive food from the pantry are not only grateful, but say without it they would be forced to cut back on what they eat.

"Without the food pantry, I'd be without a lot of food. I just wouldn't be able to afford it," said Donna Cardwell, a retiree on a limited income who also volunteers at the pantry. "I could probably get from \$30 to \$50 worth of food every two weeks, that's about \$100 a month and it goes a long way."

Cardwell, who called the pantry "a lifesaver," added, "I've been to other pantries and they are very limited in what they can give you. This one has a bigger variety. You can get bread, cereal, sometimes pastries, and even meats most times." Cardwell said she's seen an uptick of those in need of food the past several years and said this past Thanksgiving "there was a long line for turkey. It was a really big line."

Staffing the pantry every

Saturday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. is Nate Brickhouse, food pantry coordinator. "Without this pantry they'd survive, but it would be hard," Brickhouse said.

He said residents who meet certain criteria can pick several items of food from each of the 12 shelves. A family of two, he said, can easily leave with four bags of food.

Usually, families are allowed to take two items from each rack. Among other food items, there are greens, soups, meats (usually), beef stew, pasta, apple sauce, mashed potatoes, beans, pudding, and a variety of beverages.

Those visiting the pantry for the first time must fill out an application that includes the names of those in the household and monthly expenses. They must also show identification each visit. A family of two, for example, must earn less than \$35,558 annually to be eligible.

Brickhouse says he sees about 60 clients a week and more during the holidays.

Caren Dickman, communications and grant development specialist for the HRA, said "there is definitely more of a need during the holidays." She added that the HRA also receives more donations during this time of year, especially from local churches, non-profits and many individuals.



Robert Storace | Staff  
Inside the HRA's food pantry on Osgood Avenue, from left: Ken Speyer, HRA board of directors; Nate Brickhouse, food pantry coordinator; and Talyan Rivera and Luis Rojas, food pantry volunteers.

On any given day, there are thousands of items in the pantry. Brickhouse said food deliveries come four times a week from a variety of sources including Walmart in Newington and Rocky Hill; Target in New Britain; FoodShare from Middletown; PriceRite in New Britain; and Aldi's. All provide the food free of charge.

Schools also play a big part. Recently, Northend Elementary School donated 37 boxes of food.

Juan Berrios, one of two HRA employees who oversee the pantry, called the need for food in New

Britain "very real. There are a lot of people without enough disposable income to buy food around the holidays. They have presents to buy, holiday meals and bills to pay. This service really helps." According to the 2008-2012 U.S. census, 37 percent of city children under age 5 live in poverty.

The pantry's budget is about \$20,000 a year. In 2014, Berrios said, the HRA received \$10,000 for the pantry from federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding to cover operational costs. This year, Berrios said, they received no

CDBG funds.

"Currently, the pantry is underfunded and the HRA absorbs the costs," he said. The pantry building is owned by the city and the HRA pays rent.

About three years ago, the pantry was open three days a week and provided a case manager. The case manager was eliminated and food is only available once a week now due to financial constraints, officials said.

Robert Storace can be reached at (860) 801-5202 or at [rstorace@newbritainherald.com](mailto:rstorace@newbritainherald.com).



Robert Storace | Staff

Potatoes and onions on display at the food pantry.