

## Riverdale opens food pantry to help needy residents

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Riverdale is opening its first food pantry to help residents in need. The food pantry -- which needs canned and dry good donations, as well as volunteers -- will be set up on the lower level of the borough's senior community center on Loy Avenue.

The idea originated with borough resident Gloria Carelli, a former Kinnelon councilwoman who was surprised to learn recently Riverdale did not have a food pantry. She said she knows several surrounding towns have food pantries, and she helped set up Kinnelon's several years ago when she lived there.

Riverdale's food pantry is a first for the two-square-mile borough of 2,500 residents, where the median household income is \$85,000, according to Claritas market research. Carelli believes the need for a borough food pantry existed even before the country's recent economic problems.

"It's certainly more than ever needed at this time," she said. "Everyone experiences difficulties at one time or another."

Carelli said she's uncertain how many families the food pantry may be able to help, but she hopes to be able to give out donations in time for the holidays.

"I'm grateful," Mayor Bill Budesheim said of Carelli's suggestion. "I had no idea that there were ... many families that were in need of assistance with food items. I imagine we have more people in town who could use help -- seniors, young families who need that little bit of extra help."

The mayor and council members each donated \$50 to pay for the \$350 shelving units that will store the food, Budesheim said. And food contributions have been trickling in.

The food pantry is a work in progress, with volunteers signing up to staff it and food still being gathered.

To determine eligibility for food donations, Carelli will interview residents, but not ask for much financial documentation. The borough decided against seeking federal or county government assistance for the food pantry, which should keep paperwork to a minimum, Carelli said.

"We don't want to put the people through that," Budesheim said. "We're pretty much leaving it up to the honor system. If we find somebody abusing it, they'll not be able to participate. But I don't think that will be the case."

To get the word out about the food pantry, the borough put information in its newsletter, on its web site and sent a letter home with Riverdale school children.

The food pantry needs canned vegetables, fruit, meats and fish; individual snacks and juices; canned meals; hot and cold cereals; pasta; condiments; packaged potatoes, rice, lentils, peas; kitchen and laundry detergents; paper napkins and towels.

Donors can contribute gift cards to local supermarkets in amounts of \$25 or less, so participants can purchase milk and produce.

The borough also is seeking volunteers to staff the food pantry as sorters, baggers and to oversee food distribution.

**For more on how to help the food pantry, visit [nj.com/helpinghands](http://nj.com/helpinghands), The Star-Ledger's blog on community service, nonprofits and volunteerism.**

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