



STAFF PHOTO BY JOE SARNO

Linda Gomes helps her students Michael Giordano and Ava Blasco seal a box full of Thanksgiving food. The food will be dispersed through the Food Pantry in Lincoln Park.

LINCOLN PARK

Students help stock pantry

BY SID JOHNSTON
Staff Writer

With the economy seemingly in dire straits, elementary school students went the extra mile to gather food that will help local families in need.

Linda Gomes, a first grade teacher at Lincoln Park Elementary School, organized a school-wide Thanksgiving Day canned food drive. Twenty boxes of canned goods were packed at the school, then given to the borough's food pantry on Nov. 14, which will distribute the canned goods for the holiday season.

Gomes came up with the idea while brainstorming with Superintendent Jim Grube about ways to help the community. Gomes then let Principal Sue Grillo know that

she was going to have her first grade class collecting the goods, and Grillo thought it was a good idea to expand it from the first grade to the entire school.

"The students studied communities and the importance of helping out others in social studies," Gomes said. "Their studies inspired them to give back to their community."

The school collected many packaged and canned goods for the holiday season, ranging from crackers and corn flakes, to canned corn, pineapples, green beans and tuna. Each can weighed around 15 ounces.

"Overall, it was a really good moment," Gomes said, "especially when all the first graders realized that they, too, can help the community at their age."

Pat Grey organizes the pantry in the borough. She keeps it afloat using an annual \$5,000 grant from the Shop-Rite Partners in Caring program, which is credited to an account that she uses to buy food for the pantry.

Grey said this was the first time the school organized this event, and Gomes found her through the Borough Hall. Grey explained that the pantry's stock doesn't get distributed to everyone, only to people who qualify for it after filling out an application. Once someone qualifies for help from the pantry, they receive a shopping list from Grey with what items are available and how many are in the pantry. The pantry then makes appointments for those who qualify to come to the pantry once a month and choose their grocery items.

The pantry opens up for one week every month, when volunteers come to help with the distribution of items, which are parceled out to those in need according to family size and current income.

"My class experienced what a difference they could make in their own community," Gomes said.

The food pantry is looking for donations for the holiday season. Any canned or dried food or monetary donations can be mailed or delivered to Grey's office in the Municipal Building at 34 Chapel Hill Road. Preferred items for donation are Coffee, Crackers, Rice Crispy, Corn Flakes and Pancake Mix for the dried goods, and canned pineapples, peaches, pears, green beans, and Albacore tuna, preferably in 15-ounce cans.