

## Community Pantry brings hope to the holidays

Written by By Dee Velasco For the Sun  
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## Community turns out for fundraising gala

As yet another holiday season filled with family gatherings and close friends kicks off, not all of us feel the holly, jolly holiday spirit. Many folks both within and outside of the McKinley County area will once again be without food due to circumstances beyond their control.

But amidst the hustle and bustle of the holidays, there is some hope this season for those who feel the pain of hunger, as the Community Pantry in Gallup hosted a “Hope for the Holidays” gala event Nov. 17 to raise funds in order to replenish food items at the Pantry.

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The Community Pantry, founded in 1999 by Jim Harlin and Tom Crider, is a nonprofit that provides healthy food and nutrition initiatives to the City of Gallup and the surrounding areas.

Held at the Gallup Elks Lodge at 1112 Susan Ave., the gala featured a silent auction with all proceeds benefitting the Pantry. Sponsorships of tables went for \$500, \$750 and \$1,000, and tickets for the event cost \$30, or \$50 per couple.

Community Pantry Executive Director Alice Perez said the idea for the gala was the concept of the board of directors.

The overall goal was to raise \$12,000 dollars, Perez said. And they readily made their goal.

“This was our first annual [gala], and what we’re trying to do is raise money for the Community Pantry — and what a great way to get the community involved,” she said. “We wanted to have this dinner and everything else that we put into it.”

Fundraising Chair Committee member Maura Schanefelt said the Pantry hopes to make the gala an annual event.

Schanefelt said the good the Pantry does for the community is what got her interested in being a part of it in the first place. She said she loves what the Pantry does.

“When it comes to a nonprofit like this, everyone wants to donate, and we’re excited about this event,” Schanefelt said.

Schanefelt is part of a 14-member Community Pantry board, and she said it’s exciting to help out with such a great cause.

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The Pantry currently seeks to recruit seven new members as terms conclude Dec. 31.

Perez said the board has been instrumental in putting the gala event together and bringing awareness to the community about what the Pantry does and who they help.

“It’s that time of year where many will go without food and we want to help out as much as we can,” Perez said. “Not only with this program but with our other programs as well for the community.”

At the gala, a short film was screened about the operations of the Pantry, the food that’s brought in and distributed with the help of volunteers.

A significant aspect of the program is the fresh produce grown onsite by Master Gardener Vernon Garcia, who spearheads the greenhouse program.

Garcia said he grows the produce from seeds and depends on rainwater for produce growth. At the event, he gave a small talk about the role of his produce and said he was thrilled about the event.

“This is a great turnout and I’m glad for all the support that everyone has put into this,” he said. “This is one of our biggest events that we have brought this year and I’m really amazed with it and the turnout and everybody showing up. It’s awesome.”

During the event, many people shared kind words about the Pantry and how it has helped them. Pantry workers were praised for their work despite the daily challenges they face.

Program Coordinator Hilda Kendall discussed food donations, and Board President Tamaris Montano said everyone does their part to make the Pantry the success it is.

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“First off, we had a goal of raising \$12,000 dollars and we met that goal,” she said of the gala. “This is our very first fundraiser that we’ve ever had of any board that has been in the history of the Community Pantry. I’m very proud, and it was a collaborative effort of every single one of us.”

The goal was reached right off the bat, with each member of the board reaching a goal of \$1,000 dollars. According to Montano, an estimate of nearly \$13,000 was raised at the event.

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