



# Medina County Auditor

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## HOMETOWN HERO

### Easing the community's hunger pains

*Grace Baptist congregation responds to record high unemployment figures through the creation of a weekly food distribution program*

By Melissa Martin

BRUNSWICK – Grace Baptist Church is no stranger when it comes to benevolent gestures for the community's less fortunate.

So when COVID-19 came knocking in March, the church and its congregation not only opened their hearts, but their home pantries as well.

For years now, Grace Baptist Pastor Dr. Richard Powers, Sr. explains, the church and its congregation has been setting aside the first Sunday of every month as a designated collection day for both nonperishable foods and household and personal hygiene items. Those items are then boxed up and donated to the Brunswick Food Pantry, which assists residents in need throughout northern Medina County every Tuesday.

When mass layoffs hit the area in early March with the implementation of the state of Ohio's stay-at-home orders, Powers said the church staff and its members knew a greater segment of the population would need to be served.

Powers said the church's associate pastor, Justin Brenenstuhl, who serves as the church's student ministries pastor and its benevolence ministry pastor, knew the hours at the Brunswick Food pantry were very limited, especially with the increased number of people who would be turning to them for assistance in light of rising unemployment numbers.

"We just thought that we could add another layer of help here in the community," Powers said.

Church leaders passed along the idea of hosting a weekly food distribution at the church and in true Grace Baptist fashion, its members responded emphatically.

After passing out lists of the most requested items, which include cereal, noodles, spaghetti sauce, bread and crackers, along with canned meats, vegetables, fruits, soups and pastas, donations of food and household and personal hygiene flooded the church's lobby. Some families also elected to supply an already packed and ready-to-go bag of groceries using a packing list supplied by the church, which then advertised the food distribution on social media.

But the donations didn't stop there. The church also received weekly donations of eggs – usually 30 dozen at a time – and potatoes – up to 50 pounds at a time – from the Bob Evans restaurant in Medina.

Donations from other local businesses, including Drug Mart and GFS, were received regularly as well, Powers added.

“Whenever we receive such donations, we add those things in to our weekly prepared boxes or bags as well,” Powers said, noting that the food boxes were distributed to anyone in need, no questions asked.

Typically, he said, the church distributed approximately 30 to 40 boxes of bags of groceries every week for the past six weeks. As a reference, Powers said the giveaways typically began at 10 a.m. and food boxes, which were limited to one food box per vehicle, were always gone in less than 30 minutes.

That response spoke for itself, he added.

“The comments we’ve received from people we’ve helped have been the most touching,” Powers said. “One lady who came through last month told me that just weeks ago she never would have imagined herself in line to receive a box of food. She, like so many others, lost her job quickly and her unemployment benefits had not yet started. She didn’t have a lot of groceries in her pantry at home and found herself in need very quickly.”

To date, the church has distributed approximately 250 prepared boxes and bags of food, valued at approximately \$40 each. Powers estimates the church has served at least 150 local families – some more than once.

“Some of the families return weekly and some have not,” Powers said, noting the costs of the donations has easily topped \$10,000 to date.

With businesses in the process of reopening, Powers said the church has suspended the distribution of food boxes, effective May 4.

“We hope that with more folks being able to return to work that the need will slow down,” Powers said. “We have let folks know that we will be continuing to supply food and hygiene items to the Brunswick Food Pantry and have advised (those who utilized our food distribution program) that the local food bank will continue to be a good source for them if needed.”

Should the need arise again throughout the course of the epidemic and calls for assistance increase, Powers said, the church will not hesitate to restart the food distribution program again in the future.