

MILLINOCKET - Why is the annual 18th annual National Association of Letter Carriers' National Food Drive so important to Millinocket and the Katahdin Region? The statistics tell the story.

And the statistics are unnerving: one in 10 U.S. households are at risk or facing hunger; more than 175,000 in the U.S. are unable to consistently access adequate amounts of nutritious food necessary for a healthy life; one out of eight individuals in the U.S. use Food stamps, meaning food stamps help put food on the table for more than 38 million Americans, including millions of seniors.



Volunteers who assisted Millinocket Letter Carriers with the National Association of Letter Carriers' 18th annual National Food Drive included, I-r, Keith Lyons, Lynn Rush, John Rush, Frank Howard, Anne Martin, Mike Martin, Tom Darling, David Oliver, David Trainor and Josh Darling.

Closer to home the statistics are equally disturbing: Maine, as of late last year, had the highest percentage of households receiving food stamp benefits according to the latest released figures; nearly \$29 million in food supplement monies went to 224,580 Mainers in January 2010, up markedly from the same time one year ago; and in 2007 seven percent of children lived in extreme poverty, at less than 50 percent of the federal poverty level.

Locally, the statistics are sobering as well: the Katahdin Region

unemployment rate of 14.8 percent is currently the highest in the state; the number of families that received food stamps in Northern Penobscot County was 20,342 as of two years ago; and the reduced lunch rates for the area are as follows - Medway Middle School 53 percent, Schenck High School 36 percent and Stearns High School 50 percent.

All these statistics underscore the importance of the food collected in Millinocket on May 8 by local letter carriers and a large group of food drive volunteers, many of whom are members of the local Knights of Columbus Council. These dozens of volunteers last Saturday morning helped the letter carriers collect donated canned and package goods from the more than 2,000 households in Millinocket. The food drive netted St. Martin's Food Pantry 3,485.75 pounds of food.



Millinocket Letter Carrier Lisa Montheith hands Mike Martin a canned goods donation she picked up from a home on Katahdin Ave., Millinocket.

"We appreciate all the food the residents take time to put out," observed Dot Howard, one of the many volunteers. "We had quite a group of helpers that made the day go by faster and the work easier," she added. The tonnage is up only slightly this year (60 pounds), perhaps

reflecting the economic impact the area has undergone. The food collected in the local drive stays in the area and is available through the non-denominational St. Martin's Food Pantry and other sources. St. Martin's pantry is located on the lower level of the church (19 Colby St.) and is open Wednesdays from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. The 3,485.75 pounds of food St. Martin's Food Pantry received will help restock the pantry, where commodities were down by fifty percent, and will allow for some back up stock to help out when supplies dwindle.

The pantry also benefits from parishioners cash donations as well as food donation. The pantry recently also received grant monies to assist with its efforts. Financial support also is provided by St. Martin's Thrift Store through the proceeds from its store.