

Youth Energize Community to Donate to the Howard County Food Bank

When Rodrigo Futema was considering what project to undertake as a new intern in Howard County Councilwoman Mary Kay Sigaty's office last fall, he did not have to look far. Some of Rodrigo's friends had fallen on hard times because their fathers had been laid off from work. Concern for those families spurred Rodrigo to consider holding a food drive in Wilde Lake Village in Columbia. He planned to donate his collection to the Howard County Food Bank, whose services his friends' families sorely needed and were probably using.

Since the Howard County Food Bank is administered by the Community Action Council of Howard County (CAC), the Wilde Lake High School senior met with CAC President Bitia Dayhoff to learn about the food bank. What he discovered was very disturbing – the need for the food bank's assistance had more than doubled in a short time period – from serving 6,600 people in 2009 to almost 13,000 in 2010.

Just as Rodrigo did not have to search far to uncover a community need, he easily found a kindred spirit to help with the project he was hatching. Howard Community College student Dylan Goldberg, who became an intern in Councilwoman Sigaty's office shortly after Rodrigo, was so enthusiastic he proposed expanding the plan in numerous ways – getting businesses to sponsor the drive through money donations, holding a kickoff concert, and enlarging the target area to all of Columbia instead of just Wilde Lake Village.

As the project began to take shape, Rodrigo, Dylan, and Councilwoman Sigaty discussed what to call it. The Councilwoman came up with "Food for Tomorrow," and the youth thought that name sent the perfect message. "If you don't have a reliable source of food, it affects your school work," said Councilwoman Sigaty. "We're collecting food so tomorrow will be a brighter place."

The kickoff concert was held on March 12 at Kahler Hall in Harper's Choice Village Center. Dylan's friend, who plays in the Getaways, offered the band's services free in addition to merchandise proceeds. Concert tickets were sold for \$10 each, and about 75 people attended. Mrs. Dayhoff, Councilwoman Sigaty and Dylan spoke at the event. After Dylan told attendees how the Howard County Food Bank's services had surged, he had no trouble getting 30 volunteers for the next phase of Food for Tomorrow – conducting food and money drives in front of several Columbia village centers on the next three Saturdays.

On the first day of the Saturday drives, volunteers encountered some unexpected help. Several firefighters happened to stop by Kings Contrivance Village Center to shop

for the station. When they saw volunteers collecting food and money for the Howard County Food Bank, they joined forces.

Food for Tomorrow is being conducted on yet another front. Blue bins to collect food have been placed at all Howard County office buildings, Central and East Columbia libraries, Howard Community College, all Columbia village center offices, and the Mall in Columbia.

Partners who provided volunteers are The Volunteer Center Serving Howard County, Columbia Association's Teen Advisory Committee, Howard Community College's Student Government Association, the Howard County Library System, and CAC.

Exhibiting determination and passion, Rodrigo and Dylan persuaded numerous individuals and organizations to sponsor Food for Tomorrow. They are:

- Councilwoman Mary Kay Sigaty
- Preston Scheffenacker Properties, Inc.
- The Patuxent Rotary Club
- Howard County General Hospital
- Miles & Stockbridge PC
- Talkin & Oh, LLP
- Owen Brown Community Association, Inc.
- The Howard Hughes Corporation
- Michael & Joanne Davis
- Harper's Choice Community Association, Inc.
- Wilde Lake Community Association, Inc.
- Howard County Chamber of Commerce
- Islamic Leadership Institute of America, and
- Turf Valley Resort

Rodrigo and Dylan appear to be closing in on their goal of raising \$10,000 for the Howard County Food Bank by April 8. Their cups have overflowed in other areas as well: they have collected food, rallied volunteers, and raised awareness of local hunger needs.

"I've been surprised we've been able to accomplish so much," said Rodrigo. "I've gained lots of skills, including communicating with business people, advertising, and leadership."

"People in Howard County have stepped up to the plate to help. They have deep pockets and wide arms," said Dylan. "I can't wait to hand the food bank a check."

"This project has energized a lot of people," said Councilwoman Sigaty, who has enjoyed seeing her interns climb a steep learning curve along with knowing that the fruits

of the labor from Food for Tomorrow will benefit the community. “It’s a spectacular project.”

To make an online donation to Food for Tomorrow, click http://cac-hc.org/CAC/cac_makeadonation.htm

Checks can be mailed to the Community Action Council of Howard County, MD, Inc., 6751 Columbia Gateway Drive, Columbia, MD 21046. Make sure Food for Tomorrow is written on checks.