

Letter carrier food drive Saturday

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By Jonathan Streetman 812-331-4353 | jstreetman@heraldt.com

One day each year, letter carrier Tom Flynn hopes to leave with a full truck, and come back with a full truck.

The 26th Annual Letter Carriers' Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive is this Saturday, rain or shine, to secure food donations for local food pantries.

Plastic bags with instructions were delivered earlier this week. Those interested in donating to the cause can fill the bag with canned goods and leave it at their mailbox Saturday so Flynn and his fellow letter carriers can pick it up.

"It can be kind of a heavy day, but that's what we're hoping for," Flynn said.

This annual event is the largest food drive of the year for Hoosier Hills Food Bank, which teams up every year with the National Association of Letter Carriers Branch 828 in the effort.

Flynn said he looks forward to this particular Saturday in May. This will be his 18th year participating in the drive as a letter carrier, building on years of experience working at nonprofit groups and food banks before his career change.

"As letter carriers, we definitely see the need, and definitely see the good that Hoosier Hills Food Bank does for the community," Flynn said.

Delivering the mail has always been enjoyable for Flynn, regardless of the weather, because it keeps him out of an office and interacting with people. The Saturday of the food drive, Flynn said, people express their gratitude as they hand off their donations.

"It's the world's easiest food drive," Flynn said, laughing. "We just make it so easy for them to participate, the public definitely appreciates it."

Hoosier Hills Food Bank Executive Director Julio Alonso said this is the most important food drive of the year. Last year, 94,000 pounds of food was donated, including 48,000 pounds in Monroe County.

"We really count on a good response in order to keep up our supply during the summer. Unfortunately, it doesn't last as long as it used to, but without it we would really be hurting," Alonso said. "People just don't think about hunger and donating food during the summer the way they do in winter and at the holidays, but our need gets even higher with kids out of school." Alonso said he greatly appreciates the NALC Branch 828's involvement each year and how simple it is for people to take part in the food drive.

"And that's because we have such a great group of letter carriers willing to do the heavy lifting. This makes for a long, hard day for them, but they always come through for us and I can't overstate how much that means to us and those we serve," Alonso said.

Canned vegetables, canned fruit and canned meat are the most needed items, although any nonperishable food item will be accepted. Don't leave expired food, packages that have been opened or food in glass jars.

"Glass is definitely a no-no," Flynn said. "We've had some nightmares there. So, please, stick to plastic jars."

The food collected will be bound for those who need it in the Hoosier Hills Food Bank service area. Branch 828 will be collecting in Monroe County as well as communities with city delivery in Greene, Lawrence and Owen counties in addition to Martinsville, Odon, Orleans and Paoli.