

Community donates pounds of food as part of Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive

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Thirty-four years ago, Renee Gifford started her career as a letter carrier in Monroe County.

On the anniversary of that career milestone, on Saturday Gifford was among a group of almost 250 rural and city letter carriers in Monroe County who combined delivering mail with collecting bags of food for the local food bank.

Gifford has participated in the annual Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive for all of its 27 years and said it always warms her heart to experience firsthand the community's generosity. She said as the food bank's needs grew over the years, so did the support from her customers, who leave bags of food out as part of the drive.

Joshua Peterson, National Association of Letter Carriers 828 president, said Stamp Out Hunger is the largest food drive for the Hoosier Hills Food Bank each year. He said the 2019 goal is to collect 55,000 pounds of food in Monroe County, part of 100,000 pounds they hope to gather throughout south-central Indiana.

Last year, letter carriers in Monroe County collected more than 38,000 pounds of food.

For those who may have missed the opportunity to leave out a bag of food Saturday, Peterson said letter carriers will continue accepting food until Friday.

"We want the food we collect to last through the summer months," Peterson said.

Brandon Bartley, manager of food sourcing and food policy with Hoosier Hills Food Bank, said the summer months can be difficult for families experiencing hunger. In addition, he said, with the holidays over and Indiana University out of regular session, donations to the food bank tend to decline, while the need continues.

The variety of food that the letter carrier food drive brings in is another benefit of the program. Bartley said if the food bank has to buy food, it is typically a bulk purchase of a single product. In contrast, the food drive collects a variety of needed goods all at once.

The annual food drive, which is coordinated by the National Association of Letter Carriers in the United States, takes place in 10,000 communities nationwide, according to a United States Postal Service news release. In 2018, the single-day food drive across all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands collected 71.6 million pounds of food.

If you missed the opportunity to put out a bag of food Saturday for your letter carrier to collect as part of the Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive, you are in luck.

Monroe County letter carriers will still be collecting food donations for the Hoosier Hills Food Bank until Friday. People are encouraged to place food items in plastic bags near their mailboxes, or wherever they may collect their mail.

According to a United States Postal Service news release, items accepted include:

- Canned meats (tuna, chicken, salmon).
- Canned and boxed meals (soup, chili, stew, macaroni and cheese).
- Canned or dried beans and peas (black, pinto, lentils).
- Pasta, rice cereal.
- Canned fruits.
- 100 percent fruit juice (canned, plastic or boxed).
- Canned vegetables.
- Cooking oil.
- Boxed cooking mixes (pancake, breads).

People are asked to not donate food with an expired use-by date, open packages, perishable foods or food in glass jars.

Also, residents can give directly to the Hoosier Hills Food Bank or organize a food drive of their own. For more information email nutrition@hhfoodbank.org or call 812-334-8374.